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AUG. 19 & 26, 2002

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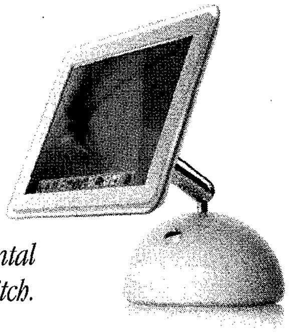

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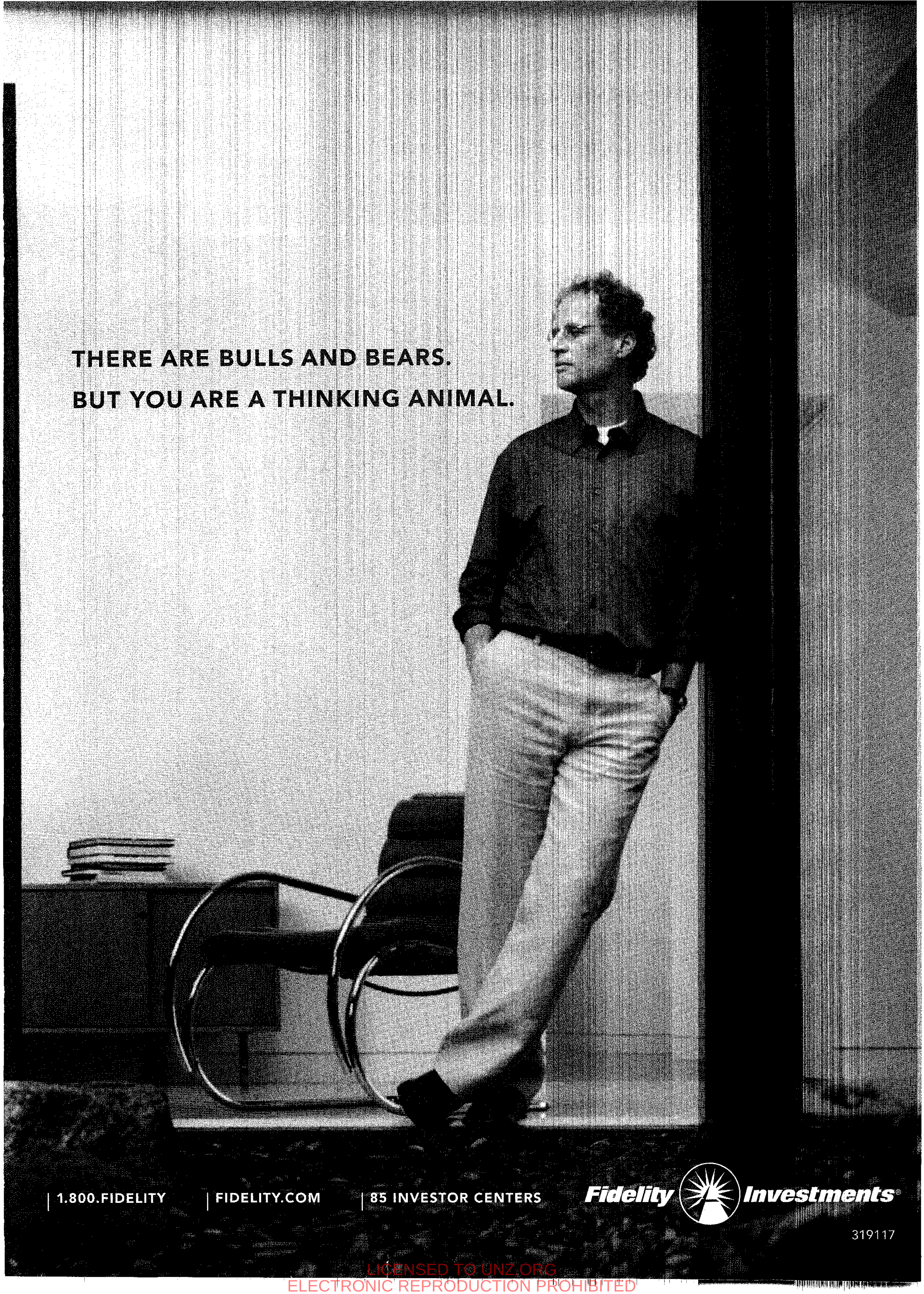
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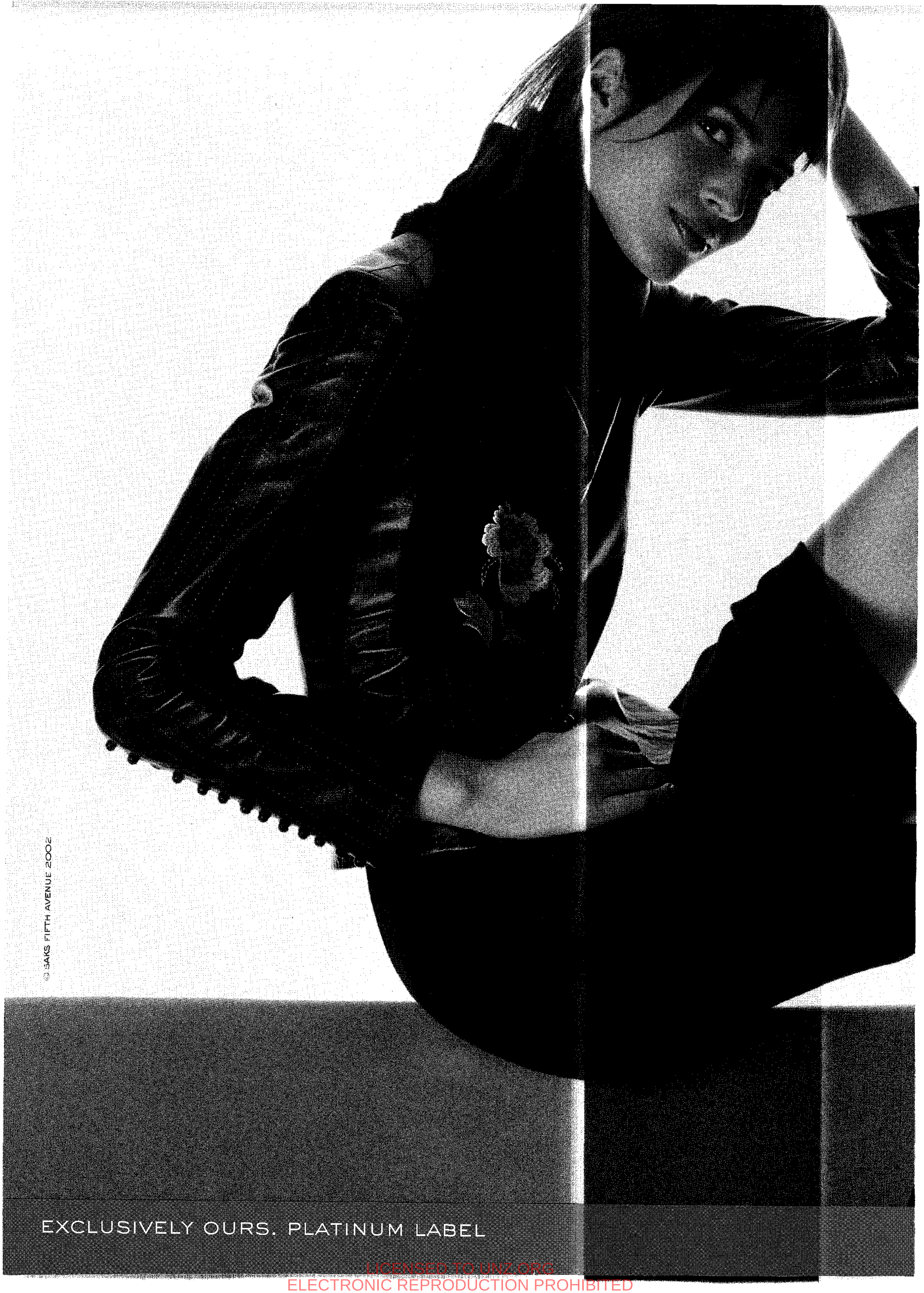
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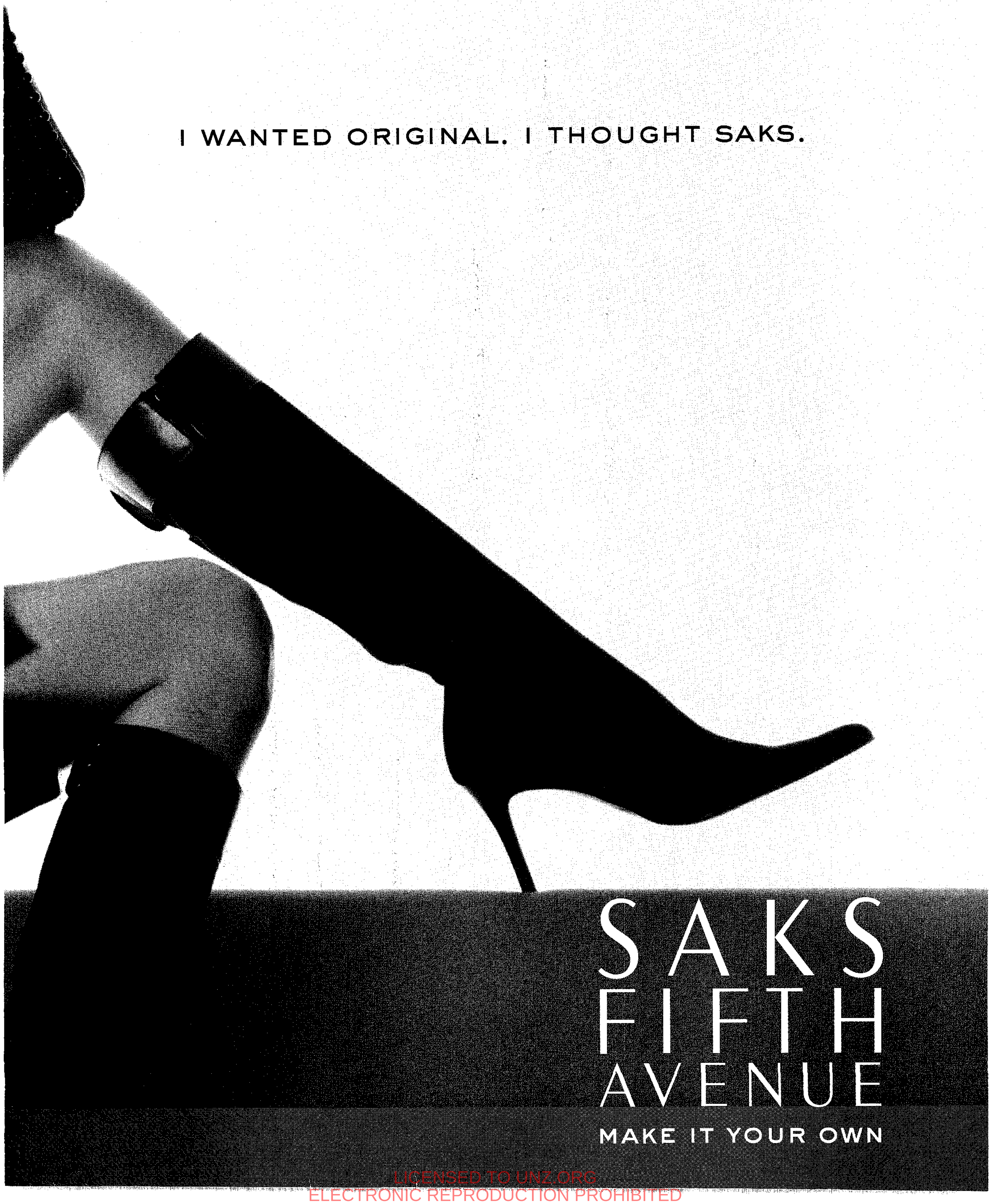
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THE NEW YORKER
THE FOOD ISSUE

AUGUST 19 & 26, 2002

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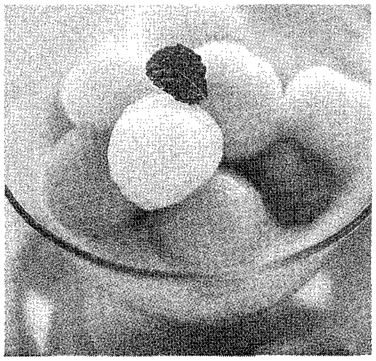

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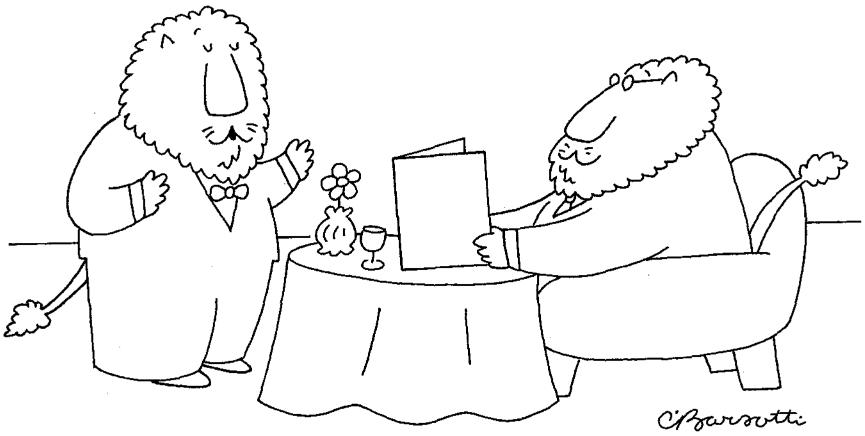

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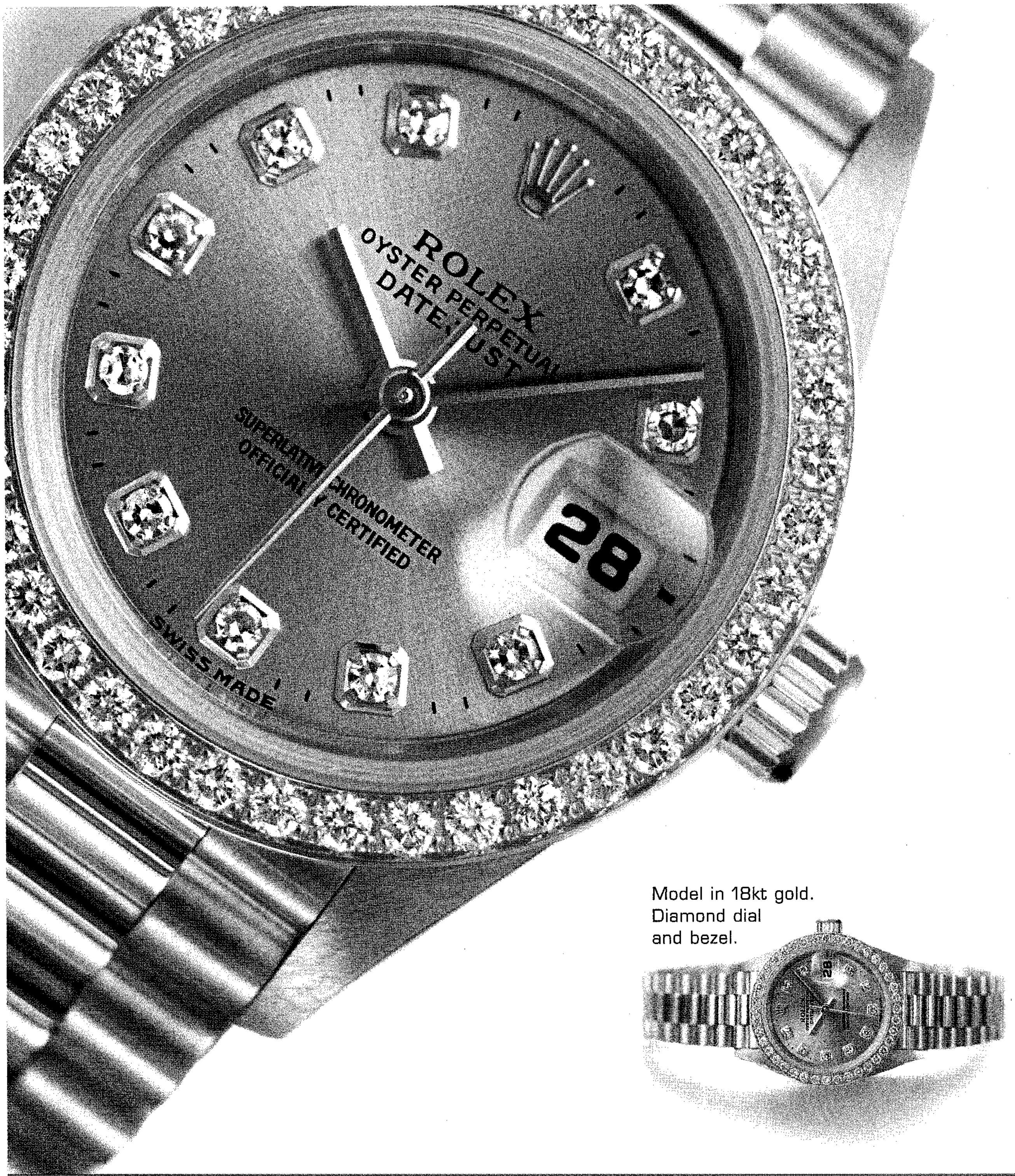
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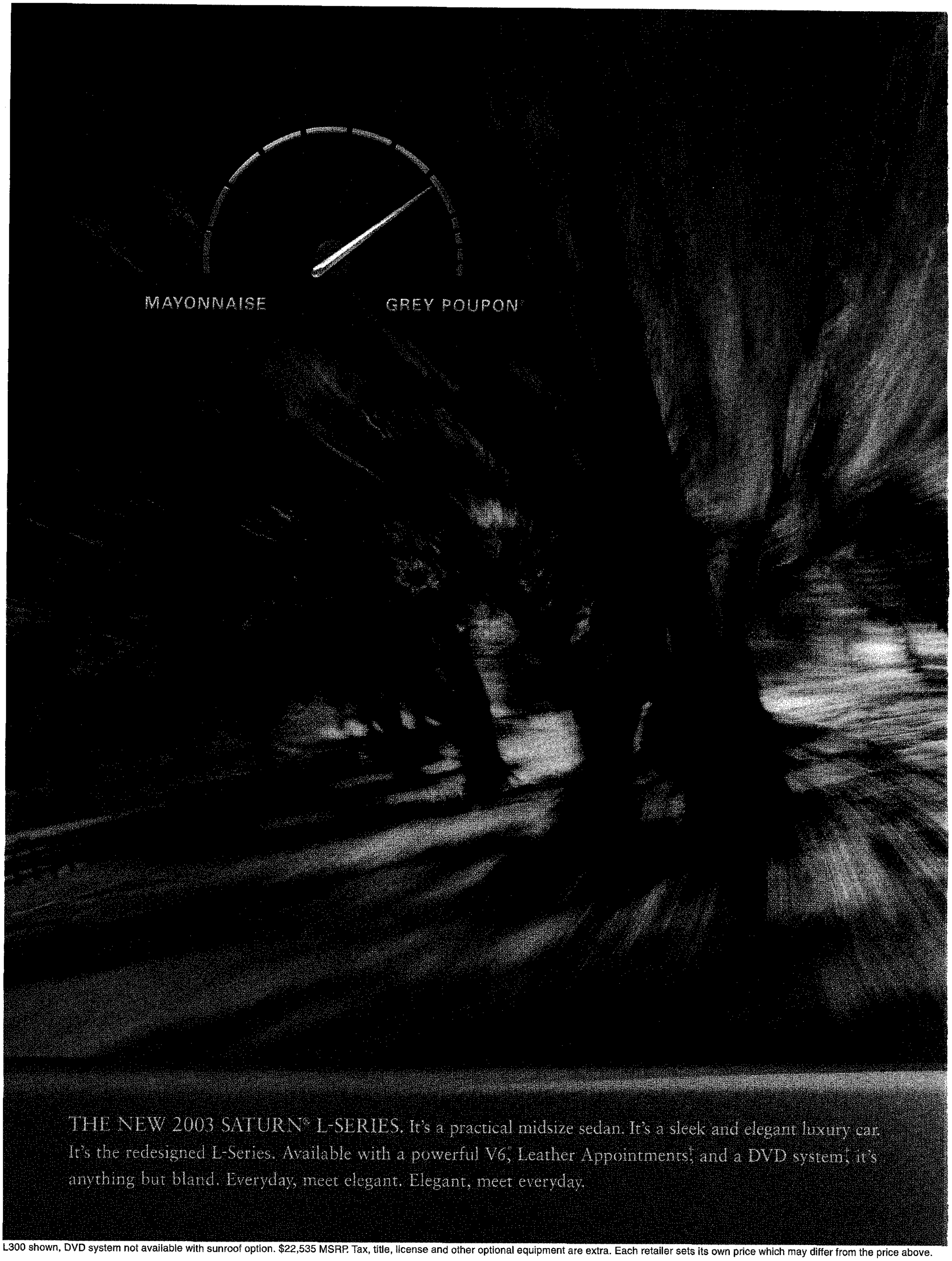

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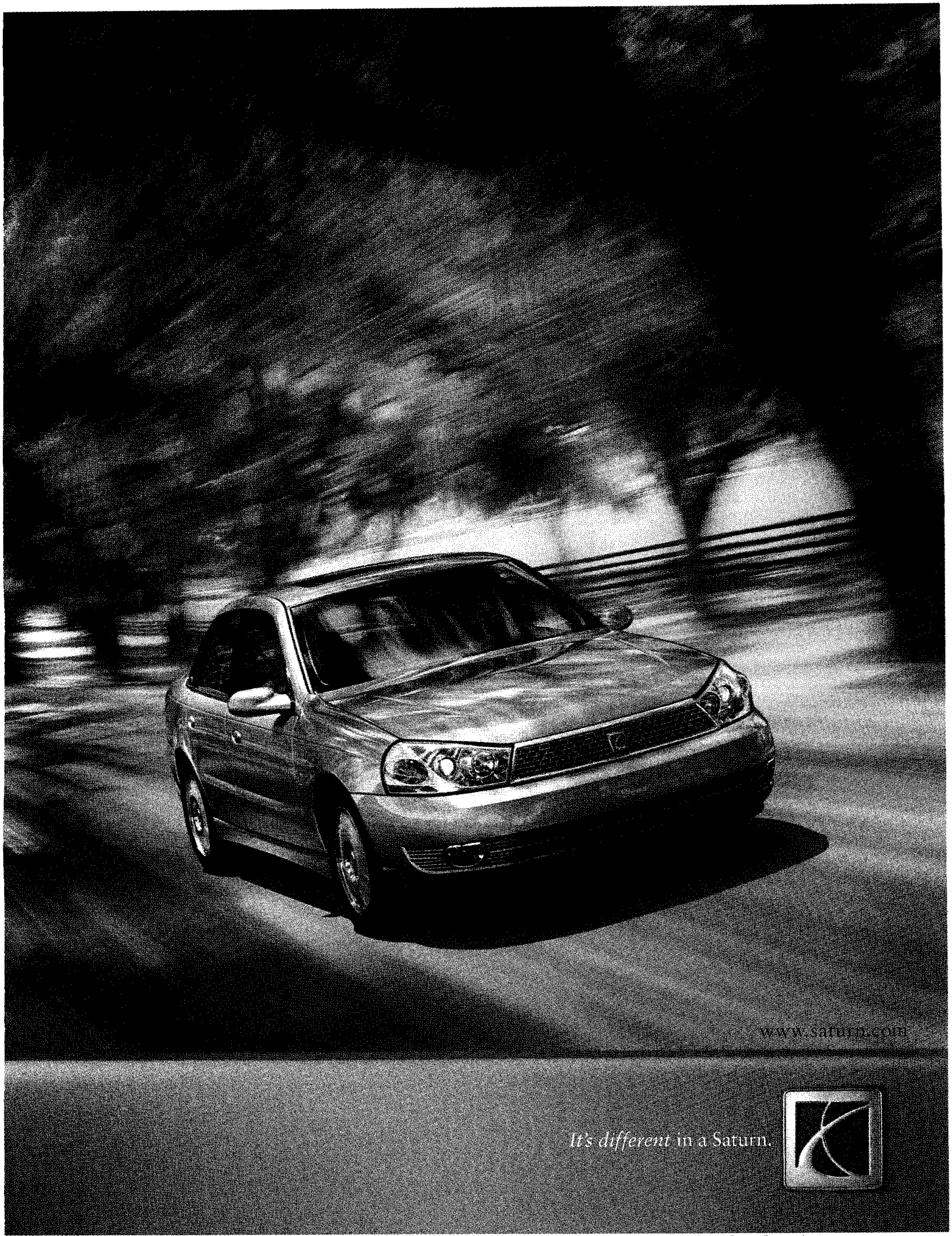
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CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Buford ("The Secret of Excess," p. 122) is the magazine's literary and fiction editor.

Nora Ephron (First Tastes, p. 139), a writer and a film director, has a new play, "Imaginary Friends," opening on Broadway in December.

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Jane Kramer ("The Reporter's Kitchen," p. 102) writes the Letter from Europe for the magazine. Her new book, "Lone Patriot," came out in June.

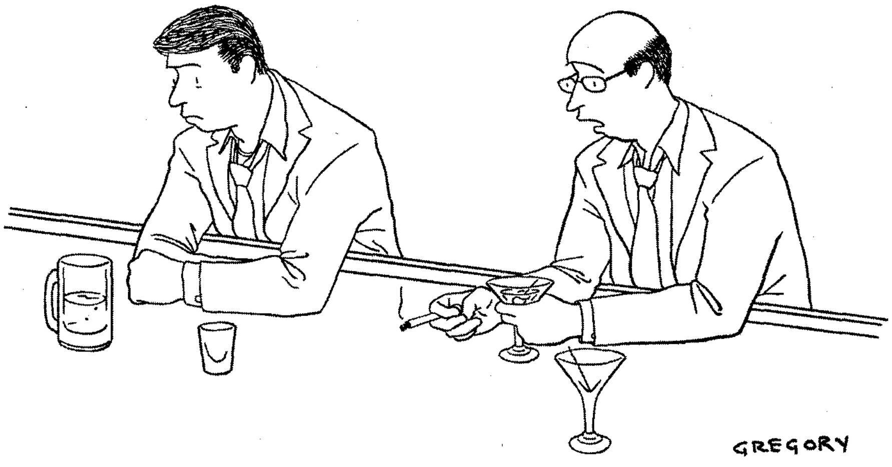
Calvin Trillin ("The Red and the White," p. 144) has published three books on eating, which form the collection "The Tummy Trilogy."

Janet Malcolm (First Tastes, p. 142) is the author of, most recently, "Reading Chekhov."

Julian Barnes (First Tastes, p. 155) has been a contributor since 1989. His latest novel is "Love, etc."

Annie Proulx (Fiction, p. 158) will publish her fourth novel, "That Old Ace in the Hole," in December.

Ruven Afanador (Photographs, pp. 67, 70, 81, 85, 89, 98, 103, 123, 144, 151) has an exhibit at Throckmorton Fine Art, in New York, until September 14th. ♦



"I want my bubble back."

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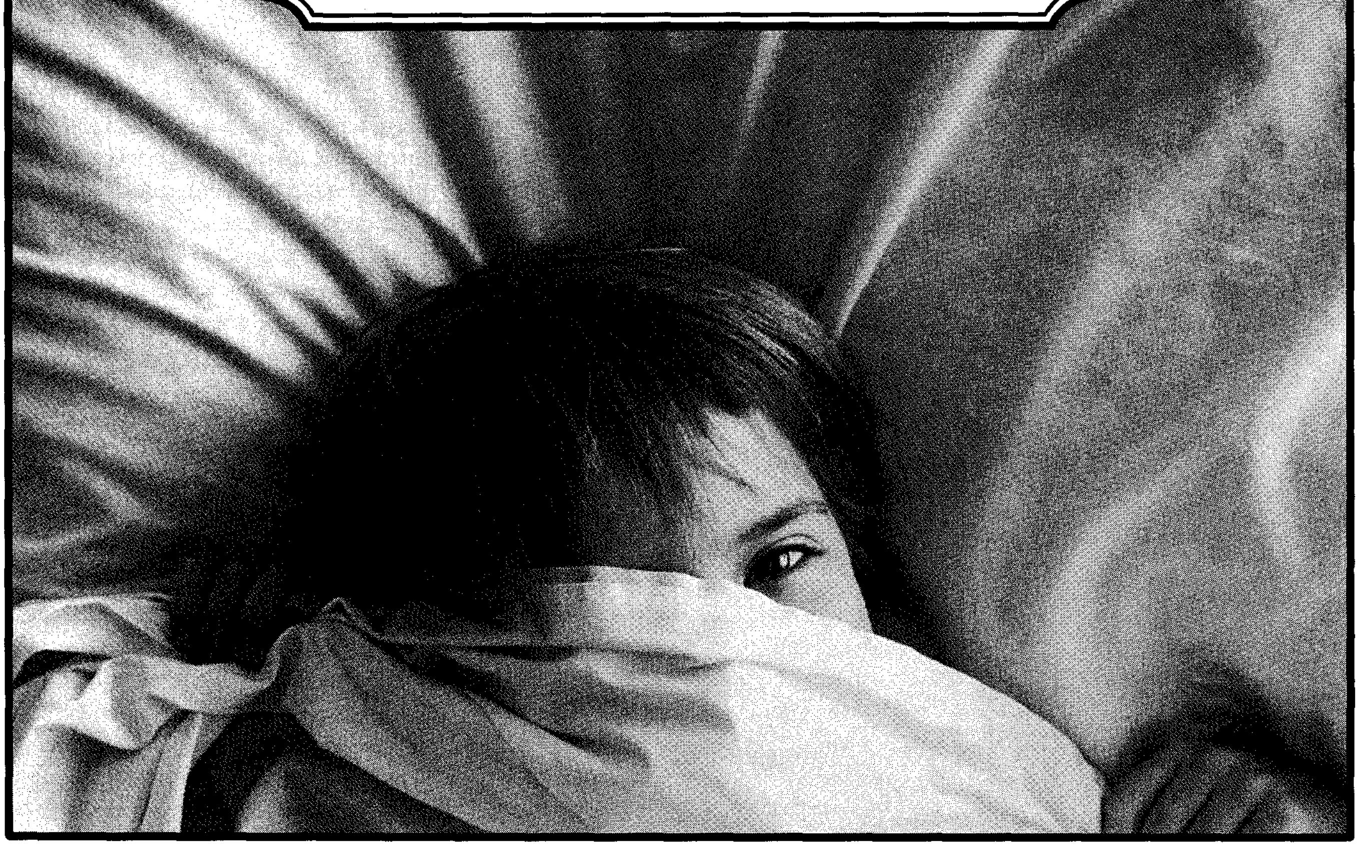

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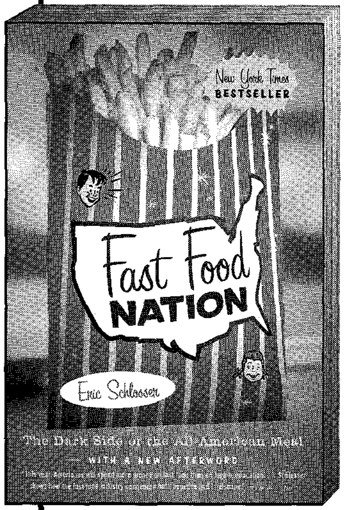
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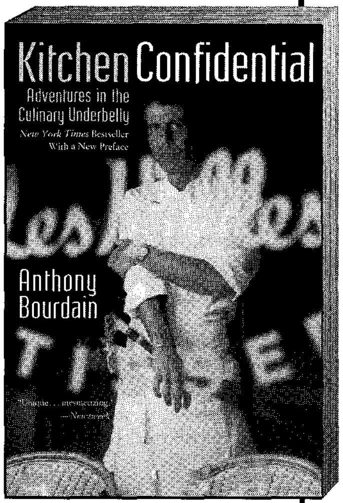
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SWINDLERS WANTED

James Surowiecki wonders how our corporate crooks ended up looking so much like Russia's, despite what we'd assumed were our superior safeguards (The Talk of the Town, July 29th). Part of the answer may be that America is following a well-worn path. Charles P. Kindleberger, the M.I.T. economist, showed in his 1978 work "Manias, Panics, and Crashes" that the discovery of fraud has been a part of the aftermath of speculative booms for centuries. Kindleberger attributes the rise of swindles at the peak of a boom to demand rather than supply: investors are shopping for reasons to buy, not for reasons not to buy. At the same time, there is reduced demand for the things that lower the chance of being swindled (like auditors who won't miss a billion dollars in false revenues). He also found that, historically, the discovery of swindles has come on the downslope, where it has caused an acceleration of the fall in prices as investors, already shaken, panic when they realize they've been lied to. In which case, Surowiecki's comment that investors are now "getting the hang of it," treating all companies as "potential WorldComs," may be more alarming than it sounds.
Lee Hemphill
Brookline, Mass.

TESTOSTERONE'S USES

Jerome Groopman suggests that the pharmaceutical industry has created a false medical epidemic called andropause in order to sell its testosterone-replacement products, co-opting physicians like me along the way ("Hormones for Men," July 29th). Having spent fourteen years teaching critical thinking to students and residents at Harvard Medical School, I find it odd to see myself portrayed as hawking eternal youth to gullible patients. Lost in Groopman's account is the fact that physicians have been treating men with testosterone for more than forty years, without controversy, for symptoms such as low sexual desire, erectile dysfunction, decreased strength, low bone density, and depressed mood. Treatment often leads to considerable improvement and a heightened sense of well-being in both younger and older men. Admittedly, in older men it may be difficult to know whether a yen for an afternoon nap is due to low testosterone or just age. But there is no need to invoke a conspiracy with the drug companies when a physician prescribes testosterone to a symptomatic man with documented low testosterone—it is just common sense. More important, it is a disservice to suggest that men undergoing testosterone treatment are being duped, or are at high risk of complications. With proper monitoring, testosterone treatment is a standard, effective, and safe form of therapy. Groopman describes in detail how I "pitch" testosterone to patients, yet he never interviewed them afterward to see what they experienced. Too bad. He might have learned something valuable.
Abraham Morgentaler
Associate Clinical Professor of Urology
Harvard Medical School
Boston, Mass.

Not only is the idea of andropause flawed; nine out of the ten criteria on the screening questionnaire are actually criteria for depression. Too often, people who are depressed are not diagnosed. Treating men's depression would spare them the dangers and discomfort of unnecessary testosterone supplements and prostate biopsies, and might even help.
Martin D. Plutzer
Associate Professor of Psychiatry
Drexel University College of Medicine
Philadelphia, Pa.

CORRECTION: A Talk of the Town story in the August 5th issue included an incorrect figure for the stock-market wealth that has vanished since the spring of 2000, measured per household. The correct figure is seventy thousand dollars.

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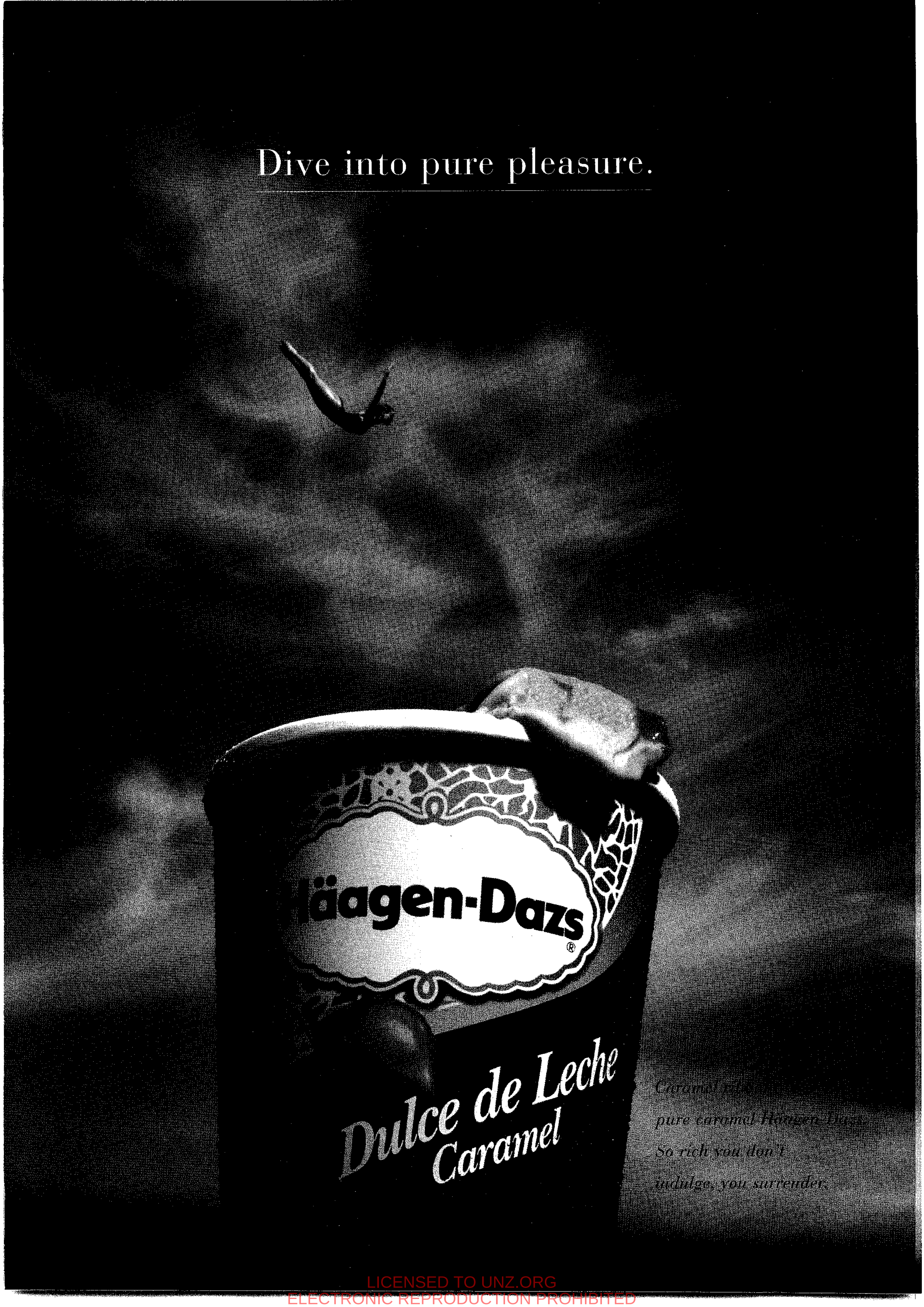
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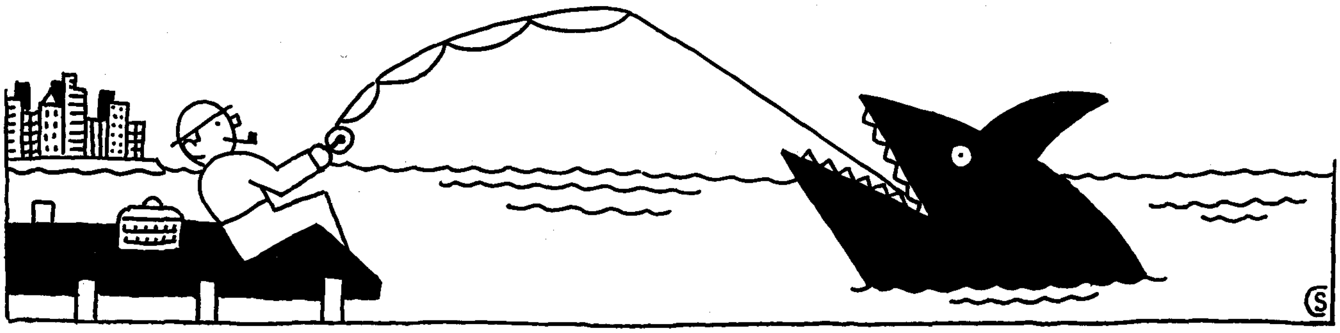
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE

OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE
Rodgers and Hart's 1938 musical, with a new book by Nicky Silver, in a Roundabout Theatre Company staging. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews through Aug. 17. Opens Aug. 18 at 6:30. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

BURN THIS
Catherine Keener and Edward Norton lead the cast in a Signature Theatre Company revival of Lanford Wilson's 1987 drama, about three New Yorkers in the aftermath of a mutual friend's accidental death. James Houghton is the director. Previews begin Aug. 27. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

HAIRSPRAY
A new musical, based on the 1988 John Waters film, with a book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan and songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman. Jack O'Brien is the director. Two previews on Aug. 14. Opens Aug. 15 at 6:45. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

TAKE ME OUT
From London's Donmar Warehouse, a new play by Richard Greenberg, in which a heroic baseball player comes out to the press. Joe Mantello is the director. Previews begin Aug. 23. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALL OVER
Rosemary Harris and Michael Learned lead a well-cast ensemble in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Edward Albee's 1971 play about living with mortality. They portray the bitter wife and loving mistress, respectively, of a dying man of great wealth and social standing, who have come together at his deathbed—along with his dejected son and angry daughter (Patrick Garner and Pamela Nyberg), an old family friend (John Carter), and a very canny old doctor-and-nurse duo (Bill Moor and Myra Carter). Thanks to the fine performances, the sting, humor, and sadness of Albee's view comes through: we're all inherently selfish, so loving the dying is often easier than loving the living. Emily Mann is the director. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100. Closes Sept. 1.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27				

**CAPITOL STEPS:
WHEN BUSH COMES TO SHOVE**
The Washington, D.C., comedy troupe returns to New York with its latest satirical revue. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
In the Aquila Theatre Company's excellent production of Shakespeare's intricately foolish story, the laughs are many and the delights deep. The producer-director team of Peter Meineck and Robert Richmond start with a reverence for the playwright, then employ just about any theatrical technique that will illuminate his words—among them song, dance, song and dance, dumb show, vaudeville, and burlesque. The seven cast members, led here by Mark Saturno and Louis Butelli as the two sets of twins, mix remarkable range with insane energy. Anthony Cochrane's music wittily underscores some scenes, and it fairly drives others. The setting, the Turkish port city of Ephesus, affords the opportunity for a bright and exotic production design. The costume designer, Sarah Hill, uses the inevitable fezzes and caftans, but in the world of Aquila Edwardian jackets and forties sundresses work perfectly well, too. (CSC, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200. Closes Sept. 1.)

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's version. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575. Closes Sept. 1.)

ENDPAPERS
The first full-length play by Thomas McCormack, the retired C.E.O. of an independently owned publishing house (St. Martin's), about choosing a successor as C.E.O. of an independently owned publishing house. The play is highly literate (imagine: grammar jokes!) and full of zingy one-liners. The characters are not just types but unavoidable types: the crusty chief, the heir apparent, the office lesbian, the well-dressed hatchet, the ambitious blond assistant who is bound for glory. All are well played by an ensemble cast, under the direction of Pamela Berlin. The set, by Neil Patel, is perfect: you may feel as if you'd never left the office. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

**FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN
THE CLAIR DE LUNE**
Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci star in Terrence McNally's 1987 play, under the direction of Joe Mantello. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE GOAT; OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?
Edward Albee's ninety-minute anecdote about a happily married, successful architect who falls in love with a goat called Sylvia. It takes all of Albee's expertise to tease this joke into an evening; but it allows Mercedes Ruehl some hilarious moments of high dudgeon as she trashes the house and her husband (Bill Pullman) for "cruising livestock." David Esbjornson is the director. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

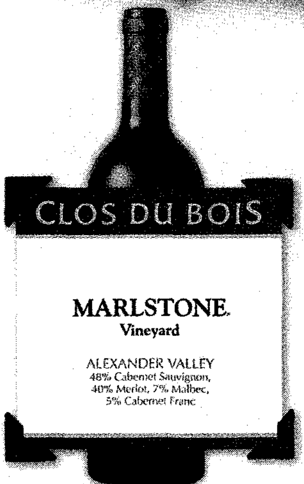
THE GRADUATE
This pointless production, starring Kathleen Turner as Mrs. Robinson, is endless and full of dead air. There are exactly two pleasures here: Victor Slezak, as Mr. Robinson, and Murphy Guyer, as Benjamin's father; they depict beautifully the anger and anxiety that underlie their postwar poolside bonhomie. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/15/02.) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE GUYS
A dialogue between a fire captain who lost eight of his men on September 11th and an editor who helps him prepare their eulogies, written by Anne Nelson, a journalist, and directed by Jim Simpson, the Flea Theatre's artistic director. It's an artful and moving re-creation of the relationships New Yorkers formed as a result of that day—of the way that people "jumped tracks" and suddenly saw into each other's lives—and an admirable tribute to the men who died. (The Flea, 41 White St. 206-1515.)

HARLEM SONG
George C. Wolfe's latest is a musical history of Harlem show business from the nineteen-twenties to the present. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. 307-7171.)

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL
The final offering in SoHo Think Tank's annual summer celebration of new works is "Death of Nations," a play about the origins of nations, by the troupe International WOW. Aug. 14-17 at 7. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 966-4844.)

I'M NOT RAPPAPORT
Judd Hirsch is the main attraction in this revival of Herb Gardner's 1985 play, as he revisits the role of an unregenerate Jewish Socialist geezer, who complicates the life of his foil on the park bench, an aging Upper West Side super, nimbly played by Ben Vereen. There's plenty of shtick here—at one point, posing as a lawyer, Hirsch might as well be wearing Groucho glasses—but, under the guidance of Daniel Sullivan, who directed the original Broadway production, the routines of this shuffling duo transcend vaudeville and gather poignancy as they go. Who would have thought that the Central Park of 1982, with its muggers and other dangers, would come so soon to feel like Old New York? (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)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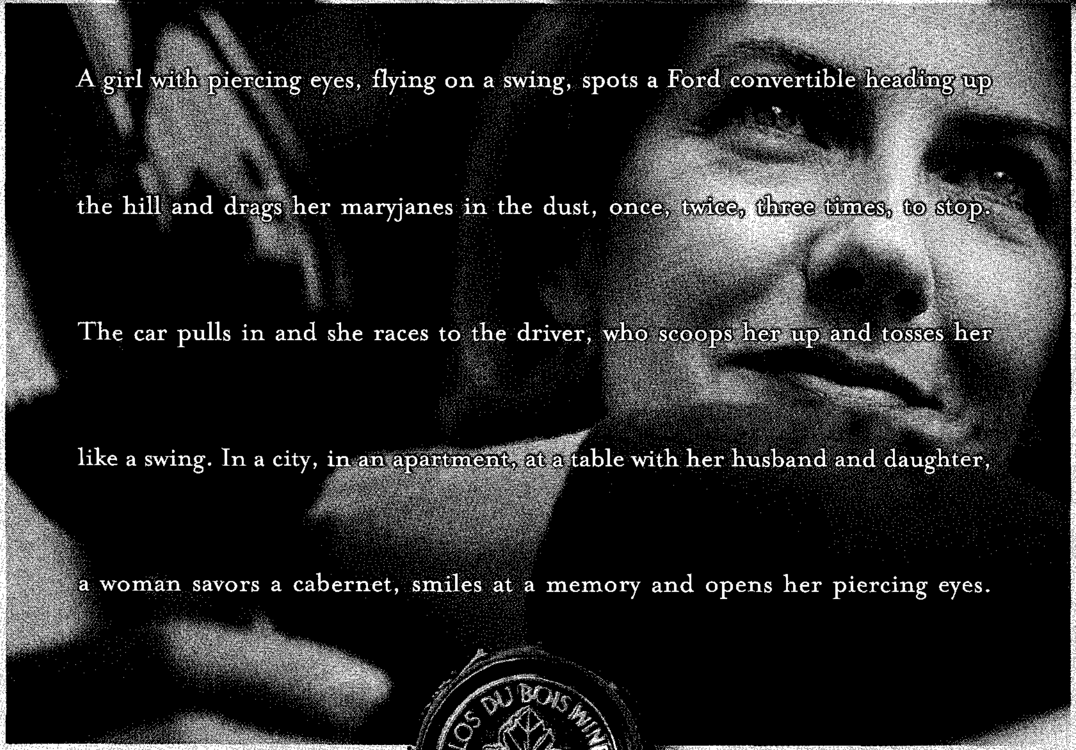
Suddenly,

I REMEMBERED DAD'S

OLD TWO-TONE

convertible.



A girl with piercing eyes, flying on a swing, spots a Ford convertible heading up the hill and drags her maryjanes in the dust, once, twice, three times, to stop. The car pulls in and she races to the driver, who scoops her up and tosses her like a swing. In a city, in an apartment, at a table with her husband and daughter, a woman savors a cabernet, smiles at a memory and opens her piercing eyes.

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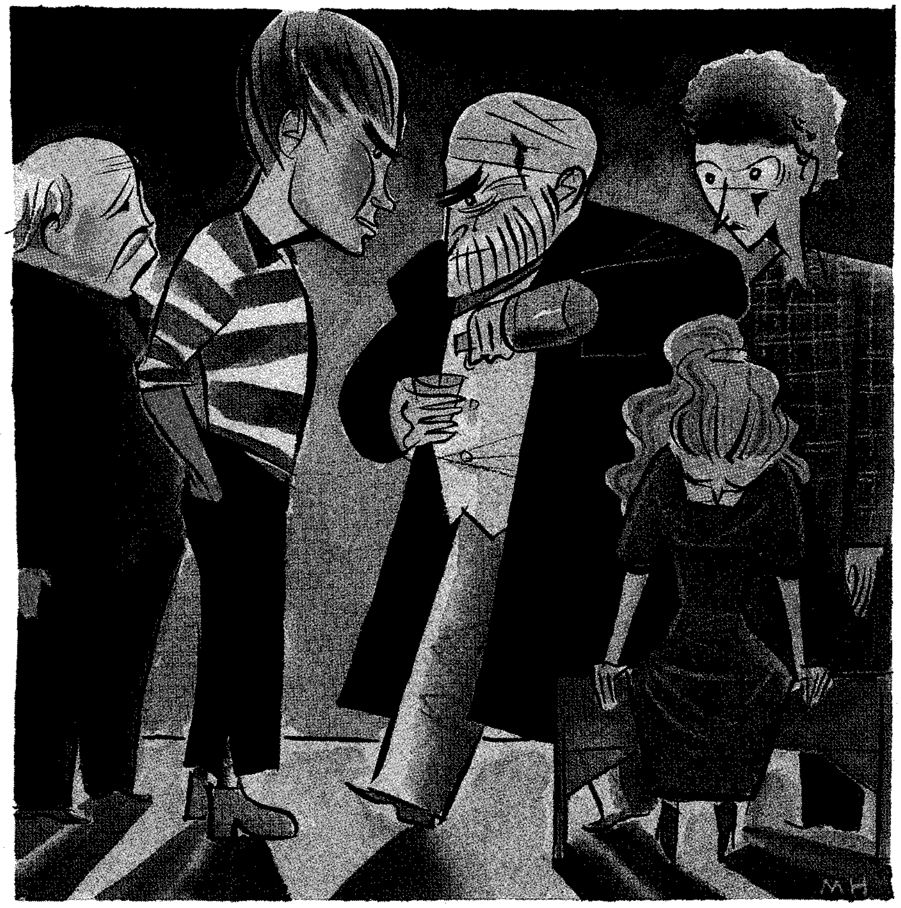
INTO THE WOODS
Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's 1987 fairy-tale-derived musical isn't so much a rethinking of fairy tales as it is a parable about growing up and finding your place in the community, and about learning to live with uncertainty and ambivalence. The archetypal material is treated with suitable directness and simplicity, and yet the show lacks none of the intelligence or emotional honesty we expect from Sondheim. Mr. Lapine is the director. (5/13/02) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

METAMORPHOSES
Ovid's tales, loosely adapted and directed by Mary Zimmerman, who had the ingenious idea of staging the caprice of the gods in a swimming pool. The production is fun and full of wonder, but it illustrates rather than dramatizes psychic struggle. The show's gimmick, the pool, turns out to be its metaphor—refreshing and shallow. (3/18/02) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)



The Irish Rep's staging of "The Playboy of the Western World," by J. M. Synge.

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
Experimental, multidisciplinary, and multimedia performances by troupes from eleven countries and twelve states, staged at numerous venues throughout lower Manhattan. Through Aug. 25. (A complete list of shows is available at www.fringenyc.org. For information and tickets, call 420-8877.)

OKLAHOMA!
There are stupendous pleasures in the Royal National Theatre's version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1943 American classic. Many of them are due to the high-spirited, humorous choreography of Susan Stroman, and to Anthony Ward's picturesque set. But technique, which can make a show work, is not enough to make it wonderful. (4/1/02) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

ONLY THE END OF THE WORLD
A semiautobiographical drama by the late French playwright Jean Luc Lagarce, staged by Company Charnière. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 252-4437. Closes Aug. 24.)

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD
J. M. Synge's classic 1907 comedy about a young man lionized by a remote Irish village after he shows up in their midst with a story of having killed his abusive father—and the fallout when the father shows up only slightly bloodied. The show explores issues of reputation, love, lust, and the thrill of scandal in a surprisingly modern way, and in remarkably beautiful language. The Irish Rep cast is strong, especially Aedin Moloney, as a lonely widow. Kirk Bookman's warm lighting makes the most of David Raphael's detailed stone-cottage set. Directed by Charlotte Moore with a sure hand. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Sept. 8.)

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER
Mark Twain's novel has been adapted for the stage and musicalized by Neil Berg (score and lyrics) and Bernie Garza and Ray Roderick (book). (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

PRIVATE LIVES
In Noël Coward's comedy of bad manners, two wonderful actors, Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan, play the embattled exes Elyot and Amanda—dandies of detachment who jilt their new spouses and run away together to a Parisian love nest. Howard Davies's radical notion is to play Elyot and Amanda's physical passion for real. This allows him to capitalize on the wonderful chemistry between Rickman and Duncan, but it also throws the comedy weirdly off kilter. (5/6/02) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. Closes Sept. 1.)

RICKY JAY: ON THE STEM
The master magician's tribute to the flimflammery and weird entertainments that have cropped up over the years along the length of Broadway, "the stem that winds the watch" of New York City. Prepare to be happily hornswoggled. Directed by David Mamet. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes Sept. 1.)

SICK WITH LUST: FIRE ISLAND TALES BY ANDREW HOLLERAN
An adaptation of two stories by the author of "Dancer from the Dance," conceived and directed by Randy Gener. Thursdays and Saturdays at 10, through Aug. 31. (Judy's Chelsea, 169 Eighth Ave., at 18th St. 462-9077.)

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Just like the 1967 movie it's based on, this musical is supposed to be all madcap Jazz Age fizziness, but the harder the cast sings and dances, the flatter the enterprise falls. The colors seem garish rather than gay, the manic energy feels forced at gunpoint, and the only thing you recall about Sutton Foster's Millie after you leave the theatre is her huge white teeth and bouncy black bob. Call it thoroughly boring, shrilly. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

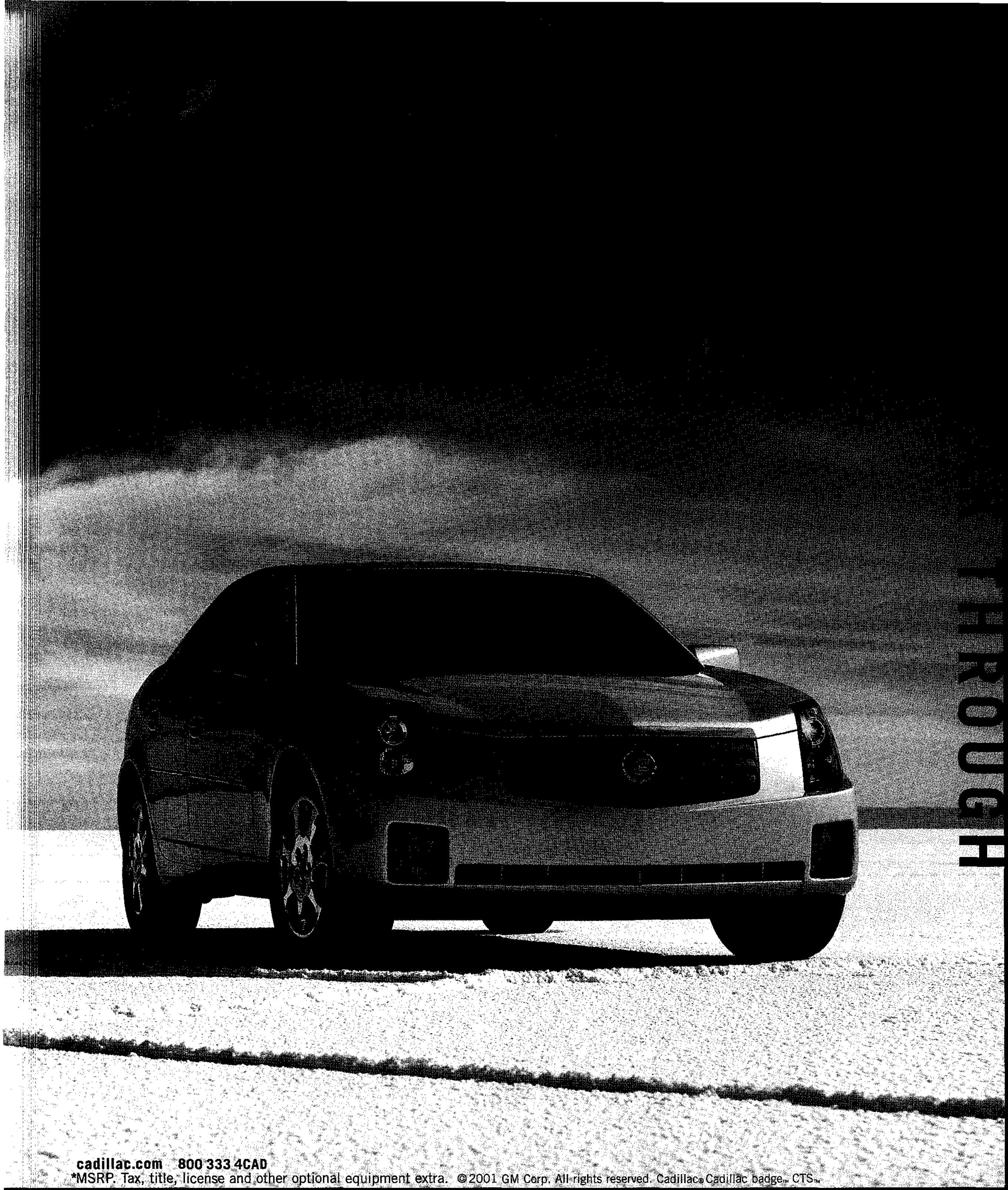
21 DOG YEARS: DOING TIME@AMAZON.COM
Michael Daisey spent three years at Amazon during its headiest, do-no-wrong period. And now he's telling all. He's a charismatic performer, and up until the end, when he becomes a bit self-righteous, his show has the insightful hostility of the best comedy. The audience doesn't learn anything new about the dot-com bubble and its discontents, but it's fun to get the view from the inside. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200. Closes Sept. 2.)

VALPARAISO
In Don DeLillo's second play, from 1998, Michael (Matthew Lawler), an American Everyman, accidentally finds himself on a flight to Valparaiso, Chile, instead of Valparaiso, Indiana. The details of his error unfold in hindsight as Michael becomes a popular human-interest celebrity. Each scene is an interview—be it radio, documentary film, or daytime talk show—in which Michael repeats the details of his story on tape with minor variations here and there. The media skewering can feel a little stale (especially in the second act), but Hal Brooks's clever direction makes most of the clichés interesting. The agile actors have a strong grasp of the humor in the stylized and sometimes pretentious material, particularly Elizabeth Sherman as Michael's wife, who spends much of the show on an exercise bike, and a trio of flight attendants who repeat flight-safety instructions like a Greek chorus. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 206-1515. Closes Aug. 18.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.
BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.
CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.
CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.
CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. (Closes Sept. 1.)
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. (Closes Sept. 1.)
I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
LOVE, JANIS
Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.
MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544
NOISES OFF
Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.
PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

MARCELLUS HALL



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PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200. (Closes Sept. 15.)

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL
Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.

URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200

DANCE

"L'ALLEGRO, IL PENSEROSO, ED IL MODERATO"
This vast dance to Handel's adaptation of Milton's early pastoral verse is one of the most unadulteratedly happy works Mark Morris has ever created. In bright Isadoran shifts or shirts against huge scrims of color, the twenty-four dancers wend their way through folk-dance lines, and form circles within circles within circles. Or, acting out the libretto (faithfully adapted from Milton's poetry), they clump together like hedges, scamper like dogs on a hunt, flock and rush like birds, and spread their legs as if in childbirth—a bang-up cosmogony of beauty and wit. (Mostly Mozart Festival, New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 307-4100. Aug. 14-17 at 8.)

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO
The premier all-male ballet troupe calls itself a cross between City Ballet and "I Love Lucy." For this engagement, they present, among other works, a new restaging of Agnes de Mille's "Début at the Opera," adapted excerpts from "Swan Lake" and "Don Quixote," and "La Trovatiara Pas de Cinq," part of a lost Verdi opera retrieved by Trock co-founder Peter Anastos. (The Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Aug. 12-16 and Aug. 19-23 at 8 and Aug. 17 and Aug. 24 at 2 and 8.)

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
The annual free alfresco concert series. Aug. 14 at 8 and Aug. 15 at 10:30 A.M. and 8: Philadanco. (Damrosch Park.) ♦ Aug. 15 at 6: "Celebrating Diversity," choreographed by Darrell Moultrie, Kerri Edge, Ayodele Casel, and Roger C. Jeffrey. (Robertson Plaza.) ♦ Aug. 18 at 8: KanKouran West African Dance Company of Washington, D.C. (Damrosch Park.) ♦ Aug. 20 at 5:45: American Repertory Ballet. (Robertson Plaza.) ♦ Aug. 21 at 8: Trisha Brown Dance Company with Dave Douglas Ensemble. (Damrosch Park.) ♦ Aug. 22 at 6: Tamar Rogoff Performance Projects. (North Plaza.) (For more information, call 875-5108. Through Aug. 25.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
The festival continues through Aug. 25 with more than a hundred and ninety-five works at twenty-one venues. ♦ An exuberant troupe of young dancer-singers from Zimbabwe has taken the "Romeo and Juliet" story and added native dances and the sublime harmonies of southern-African song, and they've given the result, "Africana-Americano," a giddily righteous spin. Americano, in baggy pants and backward baseball cap, is on a touristic romp through the Zimbabwean bush when he meets Africana, the personification of an arcadian Africa, untainted, for example, by radio or rap. The lovers are doomed as usual, but this time only one house (the careless, presumptuous American one, of course) is to blame. (The New York International Fringe Festival, Harry de Jur Playhouse, 466 Grand St. 420-8877. Aug. 15 at 3, Aug. 18 at 7, Aug. 20 at 10 P.M., Aug. 22 at 4:30, Aug. 24 at 7, and Aug. 25 at 2.) (For more information and a complete listing of Fringe Festival events, visit www.fringenyc.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
Aug. 14-16 at 8, Aug. 17 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 18 at 2: Alonzo King's Lines Ballet. ♦ Aug. 15-16 at 8:15, Aug. 17 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 18 at 5: Yin Mei Dance. ♦ Aug. 21-23 at 8, Aug. 24 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 25 at 2: Momix. ♦ Aug. 22-23 at 8:15, Aug. 24 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 25 at 5: David Gordon/Pick Up Performance Company. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

TOOTS AND THE MAYTALS
If Bob Marley and the Wailers were the heart of reggae, then Frederick (Toots) Hibbert and his Maytals must surely be its soul: it was the group's 1968 hit, "Do the Reggay," that gave ska, dub, rock steady, and every other substratum of Jamaican music one all-encompassing name. Toots has also been called the Otis Redding of reggae, and in concert he'll surely show why, as he trucks out such hits as "Pressure Drop." (MetroTech Commons, Flatbush Ave. at Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-636-4100. Aug. 15 at noon.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Aug. 15 at 7: Smarmy shenanigans and quirky irony are the order of the evening as the clever old-schoolers **They Might Be Giants** and their highly touted disciples, the **Moldy Peaches,** prompt knowing chuckles from the hipster élite. Aug. 16 at 6: The **Disco Biscuits** have a silly name, but they are serious about their music. Seriously groovy, that is. Formed in the mid-nineties on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, the Biscuits have risen to the top of the jam-band scene through hard work and thoughtful experimentation. In concert they've been known to mix classical and jazz passages into their electronica-fuelled sets. Sharing the bill is **Soulive,** which performs in dark suits that are as sharp as the group's Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk. A benefit concert. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 360-2777.)

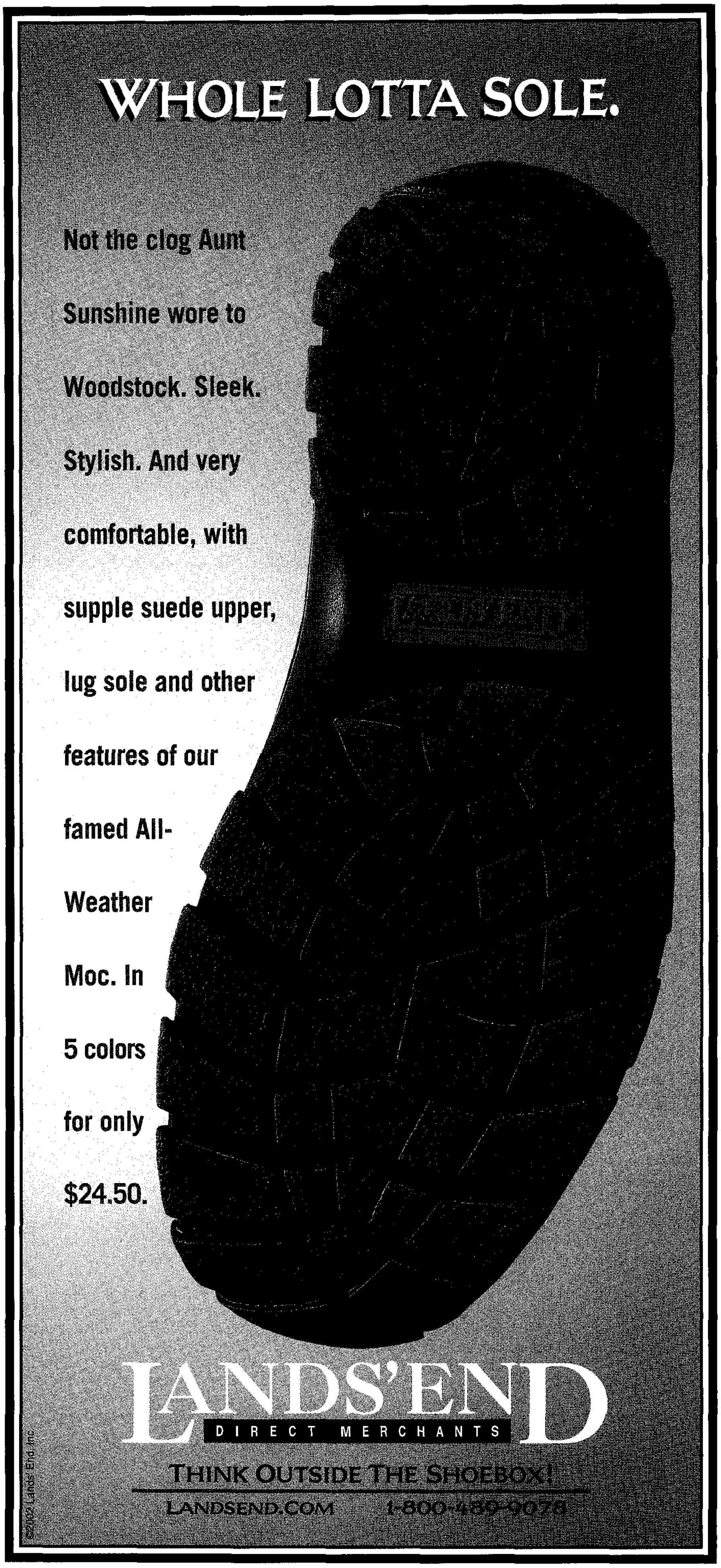
THE STROKES / THE WHITE STRIPES
The two heaviest hitters of the new rock-and-roll revival join forces for a tour that recalls the fervor and excitement of the late-seventies punk explosion. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Aug. 15 at 8.)

GOO GOO DOLLS
Originally a sloppy trio of garage-bred punks brought up on a steady diet of the Replacements, the Dolls became a late-blooming, unlikely success story a few years ago when they abandoned their jagged, jumpy energy for sensitive ballads. (Jones Beach Theatre. 212-307-7171. Aug. 16 at 7:30.)

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Aug. 17 at 6: The dancehall-reggae singer **Capleton** headlines a concert to benefit this concert series in Prospect Park. Aug. 18 at 4: The Irish punk of the **Saw Doctors.** With **Gavin Degraw.** The fresh-faced New York-based soul rocker, who recently received the endorsement of the irrepressible impresario Clive Davis (Degraw is joining Alicia Keys and Luther Vandross on J Records), sings with a mature touch that belies his youthful appearance. Aug. 24-25: The series closes down with a not-to-be-missed indie-rock megashow featuring **Cake, Modest Mouse,** the **Flaming Lips, De La Soul,** and **Kinky.** (Prospect Park Bandshell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882, ext. 45.)

SIDNEY BECHET SOCIETY
The New Orleans jazz tradition looms large in the world view of trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon** and trumpeter **Byron Stripling,** two featured instrumentalists who are leading a pair of jam sessions at the Theatre at Greenwich Village Center. (219 Sullivan St. For more information, call 516-627-4468. Aug. 19 at 6:15 and 8:30.)

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
Aug. 23 at 8: It's difficult to imagine the iconoclastic jazz polymath Charles Mingus at age eighty—a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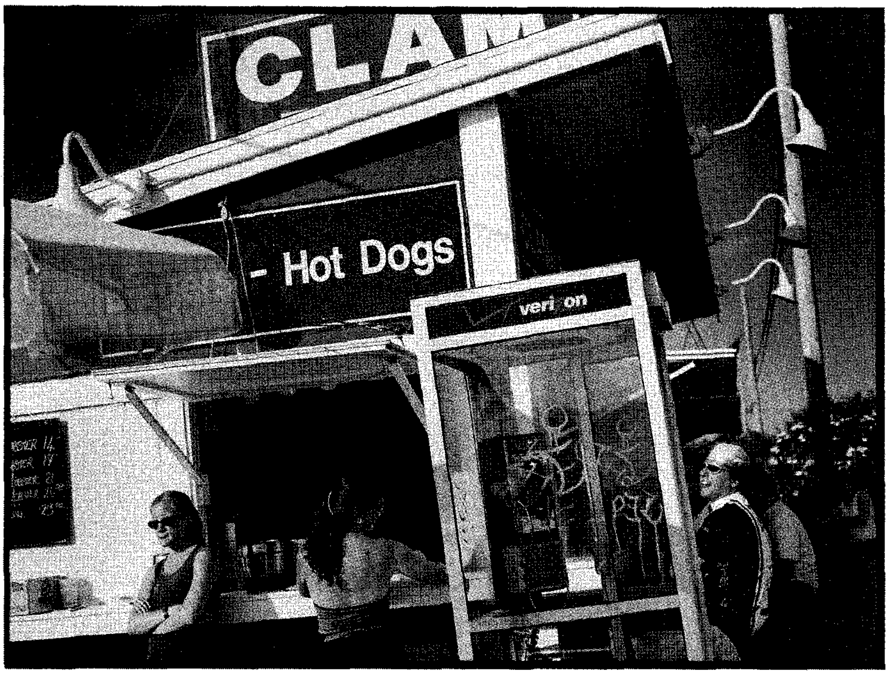

SHELL GAME *Out in the Hamptons, it has become de rigueur for restaurants to feature valet parking. But a few miles east of Amagansett on the Montauk Highway is an open-air place that owes its cachet to nothing but the freshness of the daily catch, an ocean breeze, and the spectacle of men behind a counter shucking clams. Besides steamers, littlenecks, and cherrystones, the Clam Bar at Napeague offers locally caught tuna and swordfish, sweet corn, and a terrific lobster salad—"light," says Rachel, the manager, "on the mayo."*

SYLVIA PLACHY

mellow old man he certainly would not have been. The **Mingus Big Band** celebrates his birthday by recalling the overflowing emotions, turbulent textures, and soulful bedrock of his music. (Damrosch Park Bandshell. 875-5108.)

CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FESTIVAL
This annual free gathering celebrates its tenth anniversary with two days of Bird's music. The performers include Jimmy Heath and Frank Wess and, in a rare appearance, the pianist Hank Jones and his trio. (Marcus Garvey Park, Fifth Ave. at 122nd St. Aug. 24 from 3 to 8.) The action moves downtown to Tompkins Square Park the following day with appearances by the drummer Jimmy Cobb, the Charles McPherson quartet, and Greg Osby and his quartet. (St. Marks Pl. at Avenue A. Aug. 25 from 2 to 7. For more information, visit www.charlieparkerjazzfestival.org.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Aug. 15: The raucous sounds of New Orleans's **ReBirth Brass Band.** Aug. 19-20: The American icon **Brian Wilson.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Aug. 17: The former teen-age wonder and Radish front man **Ben Kweller** has long since left his grunge days behind and has matured into an amusing popster. Aug. 26: **Hope Sandoval,** who was once the voice of the brooding neo-psychedelic outfit Mazzy Star, backed by her band the Warm Inventions.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Aug. 14: The **Strokes** and the **White Stripes** (see Concerts). Aug. 27: As the driving force behind the legendary American alternative band the Replacements, **Paul Westerberg** evolved from a slovenly hooligan into a reluctant balladeer. He spent the past decade struggling with a solo career, but he's back with a pair of albums: the introspective "Stereo" and "Mono," which was released under the pseudonym Grandpaboy and has a sound and style that recalls his punkier past. It will be interesting to see whether the self-effacing Westerberg has finally found a way to balance his sensitive yin with his raucous, rockin' yang.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Aug. 18: **Glen Phillips,** the former front man for Toad the Wet Sprocket. Aug. 20: **John Doe,** the erstwhile leader of the pioneering Los Angeles punk band X, tills the rootsy soil of rockabilly and country music. Aug. 24: The Hawaiian slack-key guitar of **George Kahumoku, Jr.,** his son **Keoki,** and **Herb Ohta, Jr.**

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Aug. 14: **Mary Lou Lord.** Perhaps the world's most successful subway busker, this Boston singer, who specializes (like most buskers) in other people's material, returns after taking time off to have a child. She's got a crystal-clear voice and a strong way with the audience. Aug. 22: **Da Vinci's Notebook** is an a-cappella outfit from Washington, D.C., with a rich sense of humor. Aug. 24: In the later incarnations of the indie-rock pioneers Sebadoh, **Jason Loewenstein** provided the disruptive counterpoints to Lou Barlow's melodic and sentimental leanings. On his own, Loewenstein attempts both roles, to sometimes pleasing effect.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Aug. 18: **Camp-Lo** is a British hip-hop group whose 1997 début, "Uptown Saturday Night," with its extensive references to "bubbly," captured the American rap fascination with expensive champagne. Their style is smooth and refined, but the eccentricities that defined their early work seem to have waned. Aug. 26: The sizzling Cuban ensemble **Maraca.** Dining.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope. (718-230-0236)—Aug. 16: **Freedy Johnston** makes pop music that seems almost pre-ordained. Every note is in perfect place, and his voice is breezy and effortless. Aug. 18: The **Lonesome Organist** is Jeremy J. Jacobsen, a master of the organ, piano, steel drums, guitar, vibraphone, and marimba, to name just a few of the instruments he plays, often simultaneously. Onstage, the dexterous Chicagoan is a blur of sweat and activity as he alternates between the many tools of his trade and as he sings and tap-dances. His sets tend to be relatively short (and understandably so), but by the end both the audience and the performer are completely and happily drained. He rocks harder than many bands out there.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Aug. 17: The **Lonesome Organist** (see Southpaw) and **Barbez.** The multilingual outer-borough post-punk chamber ensemble is joined by **Pamelia Kurstin,** a theremin virtuoso who is also known for her roller-skating prowess. Aug. 18: A triple bill of lo-fi folk-inspired rock from the Eastern Seaboard, with New York's **Burd Early,** and **Maestro Echoplex** and the **Gena Rowlands Band,** from Washington, D.C.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-5252)—Aug. 26: **Paul Westerberg** (see Irving Plaza).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Aug. 18: The bassist **Charlie Haden's** sixty-fifth-birthday celebration winds up with more piano-bass duets featuring the Cuban expatriate **Gonzalo Rubalcaba** (Aug. 14-15) and the highly touted **Brad Mehldau** on the final three nights. Aug. 20-25: A double bill with the **Ron Carter** sextet and the **Lonnie Plaxico** group. Carter's recent "Stardust," an homage to bop bass pioneer Oscar Pettiford, is as strong an album as the superbassist has made in years. He's bringing one of the key ingredients of the recording session onstage with him here, the acclaimed tenor saxophonist **Benny Golson.** / As an often-in-demand bassist, Plaxico has been keeping bandstands swinging for years now; his own ensemble should reflect his more adventurous leanings.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Aug. 18: The **Ahmad Jamal** trio. Instead of mellowing with time, Jamal gets more eccentric. A charming minimalist back in the fifties, the pianist has metamorphosed into a verbose extrovert with his own game plan of stop-and-start rhythms, mood-swing digressions, and catch-me-if-you-can shenanigans with his sidemen. Aug. 20-25: The **McCoy Tyner** trio. The pianist's chords still thunder, and his single-note passages continue to whip around the keyboard like a marathon runner. Like the drummer Elvin Jones, the other surviving member of John Coltrane's "classic quartet," Tyler is growing older with defiance as well as grace. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Aug. 18: The **Monty Alexander** trio. From tributes to Frank Sinatra to reggae-jazz recitals, the Jamaican-born pianist has tried it all; he's a crowd-pleaser who likes to give people their money's worth. Aug. 20-25: The **Richard Bona** Group. A triple-threat talent, the Cameroon native Richard Bona sings, composes, and, as he's proven from his work with such artists as Joe Zawinul and Mike Stern, plays a mean electric bass. Dining.

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (864-6662)—Aug. 16-17: The **Steve Turre** quintet. Whether making his trombone jump through hoops or extracting melodies from his arsenal of tuned conch shells, Steve Turre is a lusty improviser who's been a welcome presence on the bandstand since his days with Rahsaan Roland Kirk, in the mid-seventies. Aug. 23-24: **Jimmy Cobb's Mob.** The leader, the only surviving member of the recording band behind Miles Davis's eternally popular album "Kind of Blue," is a self-effacing drummer who is swing incarnate. He's joined by a host of eager young players who are well versed in neo-hard bop.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Aug. 18: **Bill Frisell** plays guitar like Miles Davis played trumpet: in the hands of such radical

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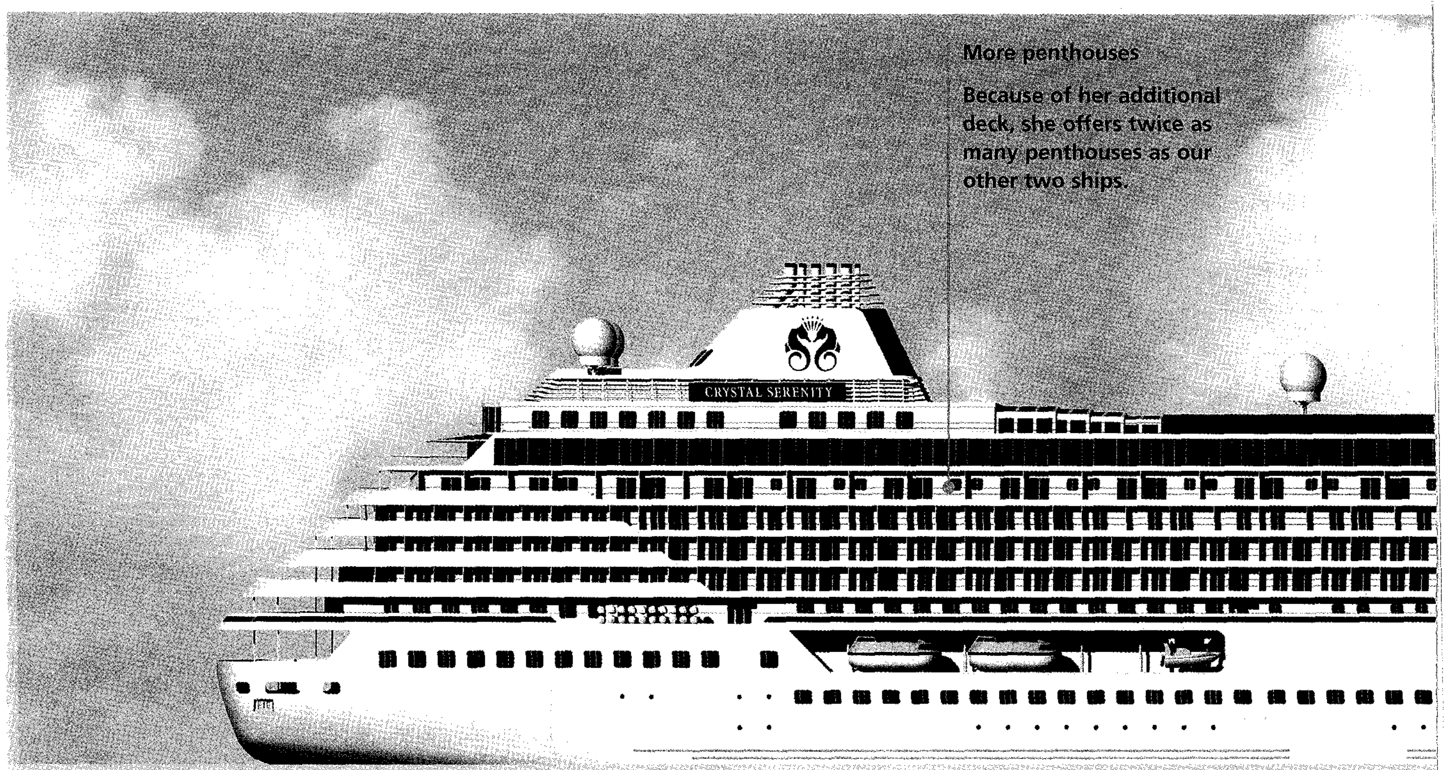

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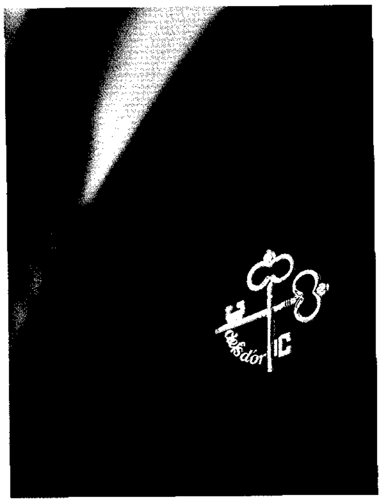
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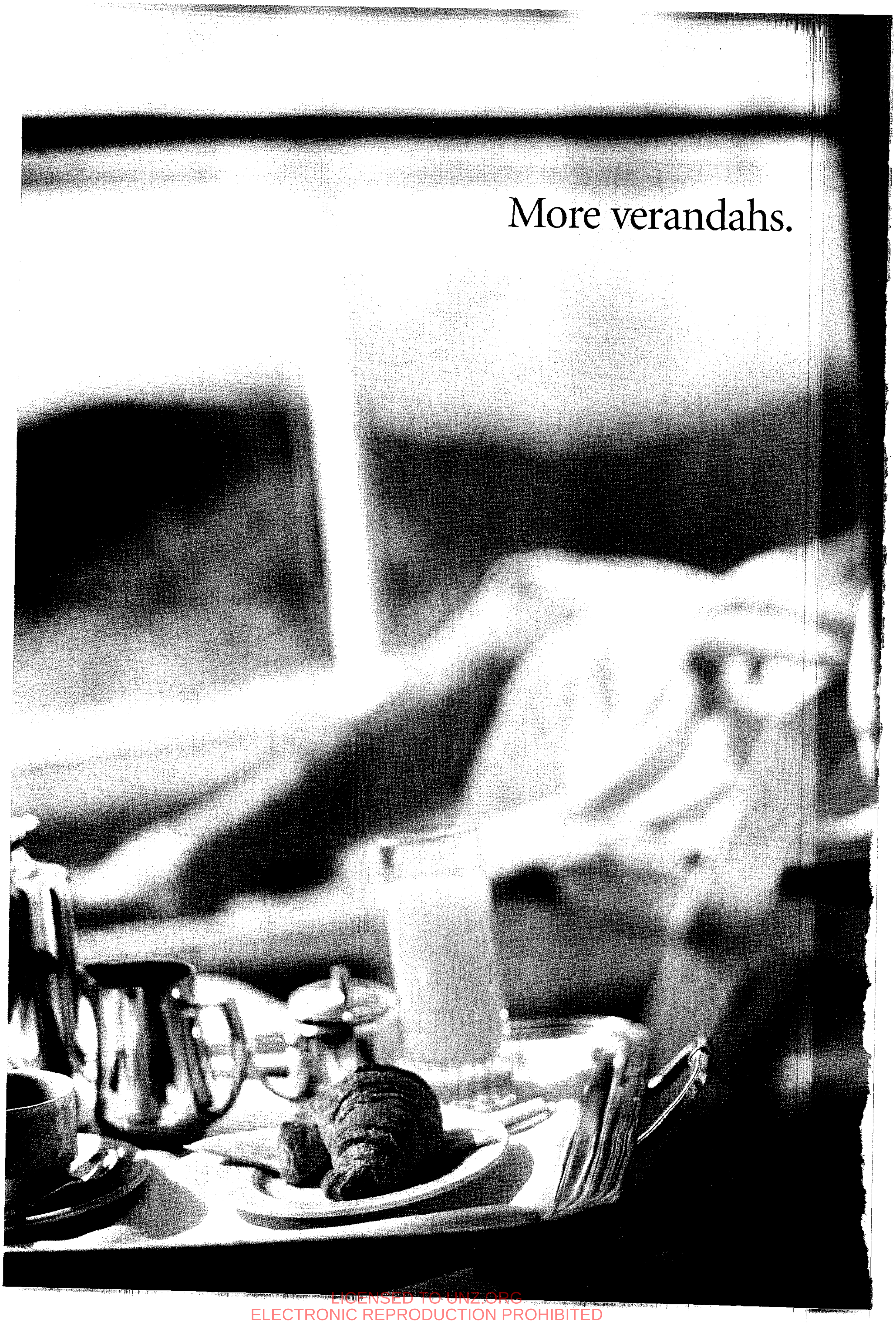
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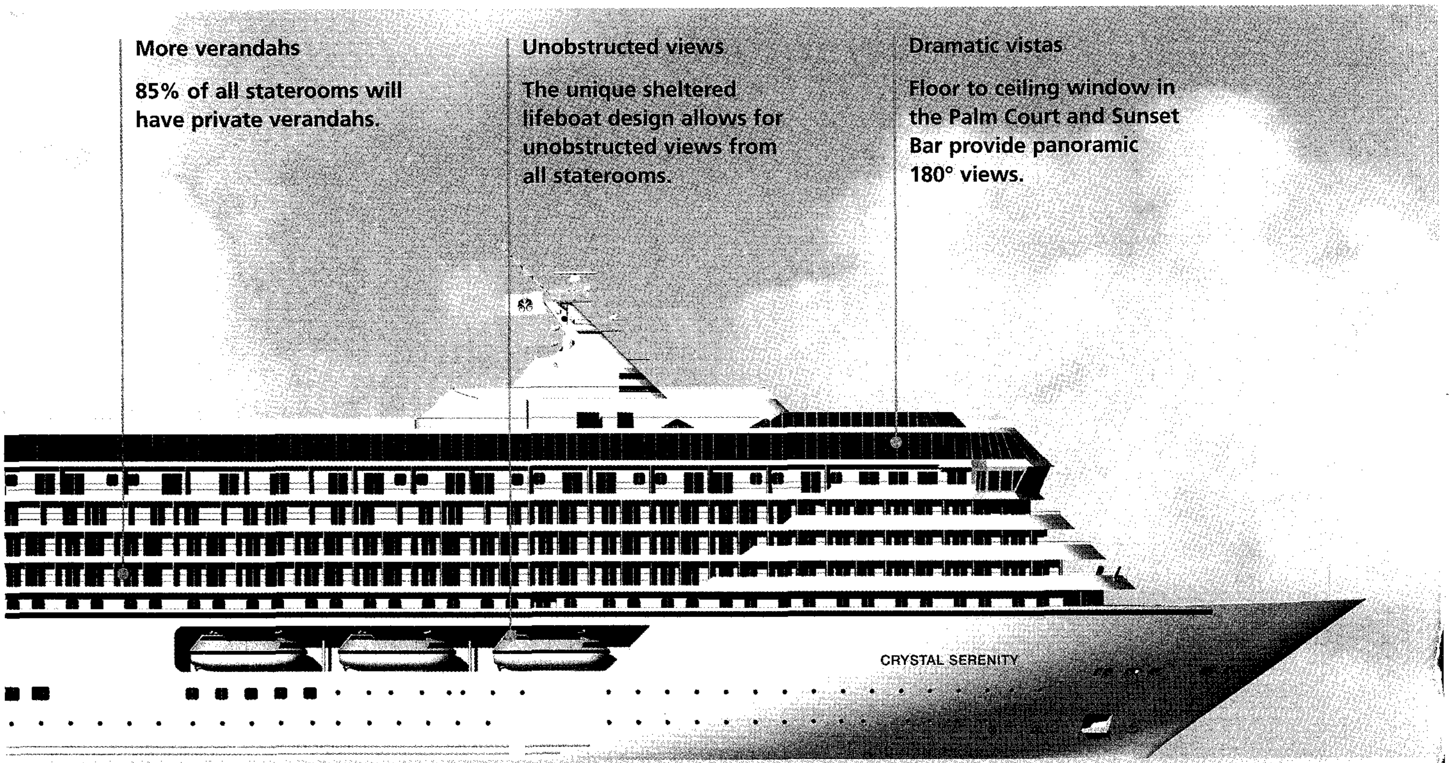

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cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3301	Round-trip London **Grand Inaugural Voyage**	Jul 7	14
3302	London/Barcelona	Jul 21	12
3303	Barcelona/Venice	Aug 2	12
3304	Venice/Rome	Aug 14	12
3305	Rome/Athens	Aug 26	12
3306	Athens/Barcelona	Sep 7	12
3307	Barcelona/Athens	Sep 19	12
3308	Athens/Venice	Oct 1	12
3309	Venice/Barcelona	Oct 13	12
3310	Barcelona/Lisbon	Oct 25	12
3311	Lisbon/Ft. Lauderdale	Nov 6	11

Panama Canal, Caribbean & Mexican Riviera

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3312	Round-trip Ft. Lauderdale	Nov 17	11
3313	Round-trip Ft. Lauderdale	Nov 28	10
3314	Ft. Lauderdale/Los Angeles	Dec 8	14
3315	Round-trip Los Angeles	Dec 22	14

Crystal Harmony

Panama Canal, Caribbean & Mexican Riviera

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3101	Los Angeles/Ft. Lauderdale	Jan 5	16
3102	Ft. Lauderdale/Costa Rica	Jan 21	11
3103	Costa Rica/Ft. Lauderdale	Feb 1	11
3104	Ft. Lauderdale/Los Angeles	Feb 12	15
3105	Round-trip Los Angeles	Feb 27	7

Asia & Trans-Pacific

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3106	Los Angeles/Yokohama	Mar 6	16
3107	Yokohama/Beijing	Mar 23	14
3108	Beijing/Hong Kong	Mar 31	15
3109	Hong Kong/Beijing	Apr 15	15
3110	Beijing/Yokohama	Apr 24	15
3111	Yokohama/Vancouver	May 9	15

Alaska & Canada

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3112	Vancouver/San Francisco	May 23	10
3113	Round-trip San Francisco	Jun 2	12
3114	Round-trip San Francisco	Jun 14	12
3115	Round-trip San Francisco	Jun 26	12
3116	Round-trip San Francisco	Jul 8	12
3117	Round-trip San Francisco	Jul 20	12
3118	Round-trip San Francisco	Aug 1	12
3119	Round-trip San Francisco	Aug 13	12
3120	Round-trip San Francisco	Aug 25	12
3121	Round-trip San Francisco	Sep 6	12

Panama Canal & Caribbean

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3122	San Francisco/Ft. Lauderdale	Sep 18	17
3123	Ft. Lauderdale/Costa Rica	Oct 5	11
3124	Costa Rica/Ft. Lauderdale	Oct 16	10
3125	Ft. Lauderdale/Costa Rica	Oct 26	11
3126	Costa Rica/New Orleans	Nov 6	12
3127	New Orleans/Costa Rica	Nov 18	11
3128	Costa Rica/New Orleans	Nov 29	11
3129	Round-trip New Orleans	Dec 10	12
3130	Round-trip New Orleans	Dec 22	14

Crystal Symphony

Caribbean

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3201	Round-trip Ft. Lauderdale	Jan 3	16

World Cruise

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3202	Ft. Lauderdale/Buenos Aires	Jan 19	19
3203	Buenos Aires/Valparaíso	Feb 7	18
3204	Valparaíso/Auckland	Feb 25	20
3205	Auckland/Sydney	Mar 18	27
3206	Sydney/Los Angeles	Apr 14	20

Panama Canal

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3207	Los Angeles/Ft. Lauderdale	May 3	15

Europe & Trans-Atlantic

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3208	Ft. Lauderdale/London	May 18	9
3209	London/Amsterdam	May 27	10
3210	Amsterdam/London	Jun 6	11
3211	London/Copenhagen	Jun 17	13
3212	Copenhagen/Amsterdam	Jun 30	12
3213	Amsterdam/London	Jul 12	13
3214	London/Paris	Jul 25	12
3215	Paris/London	Aug 6	13
3216	London/New York	Aug 19	16

Canada & New England

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3217	New York/Montréal	Sep 4	11
3218	Montréal/New York	Sep 15	11
3219	New York/Montréal	Sep 26	11
3220	Montréal/Ft. Lauderdale	Oct 7	12

South America

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3221	Ft. Lauderdale/Buenos Aires	Oct 19	17
3222	Buenos Aires/Valparaíso	Nov 6	13
3223	Valparaíso/Buenos Aires	Nov 20	14
3224	Buenos Aires/Ft. Lauderdale	Dec 5	17

Caribbean

cruise	embark/disembark	depart	days
3225	Round-trip Ft. Lauderdale	Dec 22	14

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thinkers, their instruments simply become different animals. And, like Davis at his best, Frisell loves to have a lot of legroom when he improvises—the space that terrifies others quickens his blood. Aug. 20-25: A band that has never really received its due, the **Paul Motian, Bill Frisell,** and **Joe Lovano** trio makes as unique a group sound as is heard in jazz these days. Motian's melodic drums, Frisell's lyrical and spare guitar lines, and Lovano's earthy saxophone unite to make knotty abstract music that can melt seamlessly into romantic impressionism. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Gauguin in New York Collections: The Lure of the Exotic"** crowds the downstairs of the Robert Lehman wing with a few familiar masterpieces—the Met's "Ia Orana Maria (Hail Mary)," the Albright-Knox's "Manao Tupapau (Spirit of the Dead Watching)"—and many lesser paintings, drawings, sculptures, prints, documents, and oddities (portrait ceramic vessels, a carved walking stick representing a serpent and a wooden shoe). Saluting the Empire State's ravenous hunger for Gauguin, the unchoosy mélange affords a pungent sense of the artist's uneven, seductive mojo. Through Oct. 20. ♦ A magnificent retrospective of the works of Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), perhaps the greatest American artist before Abstract Expressionism, endorses the opinion of the artist's older friend and hero Walt Whitman: "Eakins is not a painter, he is a force." Cannily intermingled paintings, photographs, drawings, sculptures, and miscellaneous artifacts—such as grisly casts taken from parts of dissected cadavers—reveal the artist as a yeoman genius, strenuous in all things. Eakins made aesthetics sweat. It is astonishing how contemporary he feels today. Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Adrian: American Glamour,"** an exhibition of the designs of Gilbert Adrian (1903-1959), at the Costume Institute. Through Aug. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City. (708-9480)—The museum's new home, until 2005, opens with a slew of shows perfect for the big, blue renovated factory building near the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge, including the ongoing **"To Be Looked At: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection,"** and **"AUTObodies: Speed, Sport, Transport,"** the museum's car collection. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—At the top of the museum, seven recent paintings by Jeff Koons are on display, all commissioned by the museum's Berlin branch. These cheery neo-Pop effusions sample visual riffs from advertising: braids, lips, doughnuts, spilling juice, and most appealing, a scattering of giant bright-yellow corn kernels that soars above a verdant Photo-Realist landscape. The title of the series, **"Easyfun-Ethereal,"** broadcasts exactly Koons's note of sardonic consumerism. His technique comes from James Rosenquist; in spirit, though, Koons remains a sort of middlebrow Warhol. Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Moving Pictures."** When artists post production credits at the entrance to photography exhibitions (Gregory Crewdson) or première their latest work at the Ziegfeld (Matthew Barney), it's clear that contemporary art has fallen under the spell of cinema. The Guggenheim tracks the seduction from the late sixties to the present in a rigorous and entertaining show of photography, film, and video from its permanent collection. The show opens whimsically in the lobby, with Nam June Paik's "TV Garden," dozens of monitors of varying sizes peeking out from a jungle of potted plants. It continues up the ramp chronologically, from early conceptual work by Acconci, Mendieta, and Nauman to a mini-multiplex: five small theatres screening works by young artists from Pierre Huyghe to Shirin Neshat. Through Jan. 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Joan Mitchell, the long-underrated second-generation Abstract Expressionist who died in 1992 at her home near Monet's Giverny, spoke paint. A sumptuous retrospective confirms her as a major artist. Mitchell's varieties of abstract landscape conjure nature (including the difficult human kind, in ornery and exacerbated moods) out of pigmented stuff with authoritative abandon. Lessons of Pollock, de Kooning, and, yes, Monet are apparent but thoroughly subsumed. As with great Monets, you sometimes can't tell what you are looking at. It's paint, sure, but as a medium of metaphysical mystery. Through Sept. 29. ♦ **"Visions from America: Photographs from the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1940-2001."** Through Sept. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—**"Baseball as America,"** a paean to the national pastime, opens with a Norman Rockwell painting of feuding umpires and closes with a Warhol print of onetime Mets pitcher Tom Seaver. In between are more than five hundred items of baseball memorabilia on loan from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, from the bat Mark McGwire used to hit his seventieth home run in 1998 to a bat carved

TABLES FOR TWO

BOULEY
120 West Broadway (964-2525)—"We don't have a signature drink," the waiter said, as he handed over the cocktail list. "We don't even have an identity yet." They do have an address: it's the same as the old Bouley Bakery, and this time the dramatic interior—twelve-foot half-moon windows, low Guastavino-style vaulted ceilings—is decked out in vampire red in one room and seashell white in the other. It's the sort of setting that calls for a crowd scene, but six months after opening the crowds haven't arrived. You can even overhear monologues from distant tables, thanks to an unsettling acoustic trick common to vaulted ceilings. The staff fills in gaps in the echoing conversation, stopping by frequently to ask, "Has everything been prepared to your liking?"

The atmosphere of prom-night anxiety lets up at lunch, when patrons are more likely to ignore the dress code. The menu, too, goes in shirtsleeves, dropping its one ostentatious item (Kobe beef from Seattle, $110 for ten ounces) and moving from grandiloquence (Panache of Three Salads) to reportage (Maine Lobster with Sweet Peas, Fava Beans, Haricots Verts, Blood Orange, and Port Wine Sauce). The waiters, the best-dressed men in the room, retreat to their natural state of distant condescension, leaving customers free to enjoy the food.

It's too bad that the restaurant has some kinks to work out, because sixteen years after opening the original Bouley, David Bouley, the chef, can still whip up elaborately balanced marvels. His summertime amuse-bouche—a teaspoon of crabmeat hidden under a sort of light gazpacho aspic, covered by a dollop of avocado—packs in more distinct flavors than you'll find in most tasting menus. One improbably swashbuckling appetizer he calls Return to Chiang Mai (after the resort town in northern Thailand) includes layers of mango, lobster, papaya, and truffled artichoke in a wrapping of Serrano ham. This sort of culinary thrill-seeking was epidemic back in the nineties; the intent was sensual alertness, but too often the result was indigestion. Nonetheless, Bouley is subtler than his ingredients would lead you to believe. With any luck, the schizophrenic service will keep enough people away so that anyone can get a reservation. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $32-$36.)

—Kevin Conley

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AND: A calendar of *New Yorker* events across the country

from a tree limb in 1942 by an American prisoner of war in Germany. In addition to countless mitts, caps, cards, and pennants are less orthodox items, such as a white yarmulke adorned with red stitching like a baseball. Through Aug. 18. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (423-3200)—First-century Jerusalem is given the field-trip treatment in **"Camels and Caravans: Daily Life in Ancient Israel,"** an educational show geared to grade-schoolers. Artifacts from the museum's collection—terra-cotta jugs, glass amphoras, a camel figurine—are displayed in vitrines beside hands-on exhibits that invite children to construct mosaics, dress in period costume, and sift through sand in an archeological dig. There's even a petting zoo of sorts: two cartoon cutouts of a ram and a ewe, both covered in sheepskin. Through June 2003. (Open Sundays 10 to 5:45, Mondays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

1 Bowling Green (514-3700)—Japan has its Living Treasures, and Mexico's Fomento Cultural Banamex has recently instituted a similar program, identifying a hundred and eighty-one living masters of traditional folk arts. In **"Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art,"** more than five hundred works by these artisans are displayed, from brilliantly painted ceramics to dazzling embroideries and gleaming silver. Items are arranged according to their materials, allowing comparison between different achievements in wood, wax, stone, tin, leather, beadwork, paper, and glass. Among the most amazing entries are a group of doll-house-size chairs exquisitely carved from horn by Luis Felipe Murillo Carrillo and Carlos Chacón Gómez and a pair of gold-and-flower-encrusted Day of the Dead skulls by Wenceslao Rivas Contreras, which look like polychromed marble but are actually molded sugar. Through March 15. ♦ **"Booming Out: Mohawk Iron Workers Build New York."** Through Oct. 15. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. (873-3400)—For the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the museum offers a tutorial called **"Me, Myself, and Infrastructure,"** which holds forth on engineering and the design and maintenance of the man-made world. The structures under investigation range from the near-invisible, like water mains and cell-phone towers, to the conspicuous, like dams and Wal-Marts. The show, originally scheduled for the World Financial Center this past spring, concludes with a professional disclaimer for the fall of the World Trade Center: "No skyscraper design could ever have taken into account the conditions of the September 11 attack." Similar apologias (there was "no way of recognizing" that the St. Francis Dam was built on weak rock) and political gambits (the federal government receives C's and D's on an infrastructure-maintenance report card) contribute to a sense that the show, which doesn't seem to know whether it's meant for adults or children, is slightly out of place at its present venue. Through Sept. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

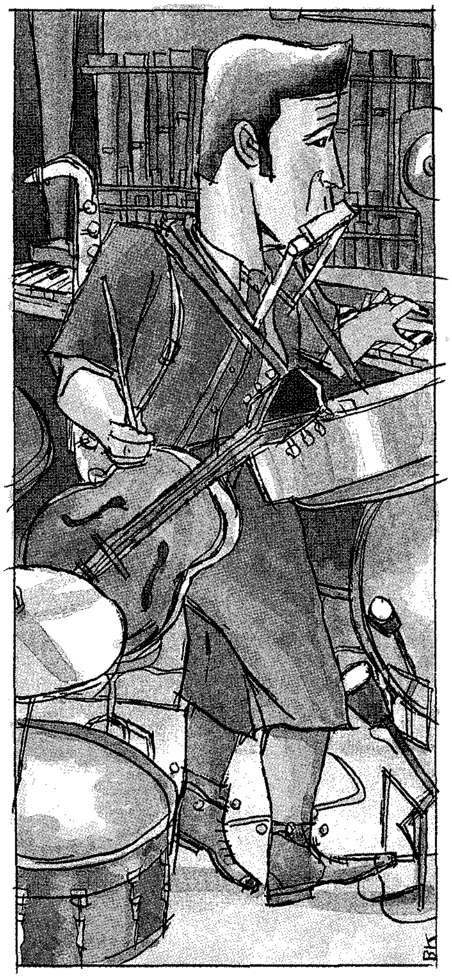
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Mexico City: An Exhibition About the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values"** is the arch title of a visceral, important show. Videos, photography, and installations by nineteen Mexicans and resident foreigners peg Mexico City as the Weimar Berlin of our days, where urban adventurers confront epic social chaos with ultra-dark irony and cosmopolitan élan. There's some rough stuff here: a room filled with a fog of water that was used to wash corpses in a morgue (it smells musty) and videotapes made by two sociopath artists of themselves stealing car stereos. Other works rankle more subtly, such as a portable version of Barnett Newman's "Broken Obelisk" made from the pink plastic tarpaulin typically used by Mexican street venders, by Eduardo Abaroa. The show's mordant wit echoes the rapturous fatalism of the recent terrific Mexican movies "Amores Perros" and "Y Tu Mamá También." Something rich and strange is afoot in Mexico City. Through Sept. 2. ♦ Between 1746 and 1755, Samuel Johnson wrote the first dictionary of the English language almost unaided. In the audio-visual installation **"Definition"** (2000), the young filmmaker and videographer Matthew Buckingham—whose work, like Johnson's, relies on an archive of arcane but useful knowledge—celebrates and affectionately mocks his elder's achievement. A single projected slide shows Johnson's empty, sunlit workroom. The gallery floor is steeply raked to mimic the slant of the garret's dormer window, while a recorded narrative (gorgeously read by novelist Patrick McGrath) explains Johnson's abecedarian exploits. It's like stepping into the cool hush of a grand library. Through Sept. 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

RACHEL FEINSTEIN

Picture a Skittles commercial set in the Italian Baroque and you get an idea of the confectionery sculpture installed in Sotheby's nine-story atrium. (It's the second site-specific commission by a young artist in a series produced in part by the Art Production Fund.) Rainbow stripes line the arched footpath of the bridge, whose gilded surface is decorated with glass bubbles, twining serpents, and biomorphic bulges that invoke the gold-painted objects of Yayoi Kusama. The work doesn't command much attention from below, but up close it feels like the rebellious daughter of the Bridge of Sighs. Through Sept. 1. (Sotheby's, 72nd St. at York Ave. 606-7000.)



The Lonesome Organist, at Southpaw and Tonic (see Night Life—Clubs).

BEN KATCHOR

"THE GREEKS AND THE SEA"

In Greece, one is never more than forty miles from the sea; the ancient Athenians, who lived "to swim and learn letters," were one of the first truly maritime powers. Most of this exhibit of Hellenic seacraft is haphazardly arranged, with ancient schooners listing alongside British-made steamers procured for the War of Independence, but two examples from antiquity redeem the trip. The mighty trireme was built after the Oracle at Delphi decreed that only "wooden walls" would save Athens from the Persians. Powered by two hundred oarsmen seated in three banks below decks, the warship speared its prow into the bellies of enemy vessels until they sunk. By the Byzantine era, the Greeks had refined their attack: the *dromon* discharged "liquid fire" from its nose, a substance said to be so combustible that no sea could extinguish the flames; snake- and scorpion-hurling catapults provided backup. Through Sept. 26. (Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 7 W. 57th St. 308-6908.)

"IMAGINE NEW YORK"

In the months following the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Municipal Art Society ran a series of community brainstorming seminars called "Imagine New York." Their volunteers asked, "What have we lost?," "How have we changed?," and "What is your vision of the future?" The answers they got appear here in edited form, reduced (to the point of absurdity) to forty-nine common visions—from "Make neighborhood more livable" to "Reassess U.S. foreign policy"—accompanied by selections from the 18,642 raw drawings, models, and ideas sketched by respondents. Through Oct. 10. (457 Madison Ave., at 51st St. 935-3960.)

"MANHATTAN AND MONHEGAN: A TALE OF TWO ISLANDS"

In the summer of 1903, Robert Henri fled Manhattan for Monhegan island, ten miles off the coast of Maine, a seasonal exodus still made by artists today. Here a century's worth of paintings pay homage to the intertwined history of the two locales, from Henri's rocky seascape to a small scene of Central Park by Arthur Cohen that was forty-one years in the making (it's dated 1960-2001). Most of the work follows in Henri's realist footsteps; notable exceptions include Reuben Tam's grisaille abstraction of frothy surf circa 1950 and a gleeful 1980 watercolor by Fred Mitchell of the Statue of Liberty ferry. Through Aug. 27. (David Findlay, Jr., 41 E. 57th St. 486-7660.)

"A SLOW TIME IN ARCADIA"

This two-person show takes its title from a rollicking, utterly prepossessing 1977 landscape by Roy de Forest. Far from being tranquil, it swarms with volcanoes, rabbits, and multicolored dingoes. With a gathering of early and later works, the show as a whole amounts to a haphazard retrospective of de Forest and his "California funk" colleague, William T. Wiley. They're a likable pair of misfits, classic examples of a seventies artistic type, the self-marginalizing eccentric. Wiley's delicate watercolors and constructions get overshadowed by de Forest's folk fauvism, but you have the feeling that he wouldn't care. Through Aug. 23. (George Adams, 41 W. 57th St. 644-5665.)

"SUMMER"

A quartet of etchings by Inka Essenhigh—tendril-bearing, Walkman-wearing aliens on the beach—and a quartet of Roxy Paine's sandcastle/scatological "Scumak" sculptures—gloppy piles of red polyethylene extruded by the artist's own machine—anchor a show called "Summer," a collection of loosely sun-and-sea-related works. Sol LeWitt's wall drawing sheds a pale, warm light, and Fred Tomaselli stirs up a firestorm of pills, leaves, and slivers of pictures cut from magazines, while a multi-channel projection of a 1966 Bruce Baillie film looks back on better days—a leisurely pan across a brilliant sky and garden accompanied by Ella Fitzgerald singing "All My Life." Through Aug. 23. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

"SUMMER IN THE GARDEN"

In the early twentieth century, American sculptors turned from public monuments to smaller works intended for private settings. A dozen such garden statues, from Bonnie MacLeary's tabletop fountain of a girl bitten by a crab to Janet Scudder's cherub perched on a globe, form the centerpiece of this

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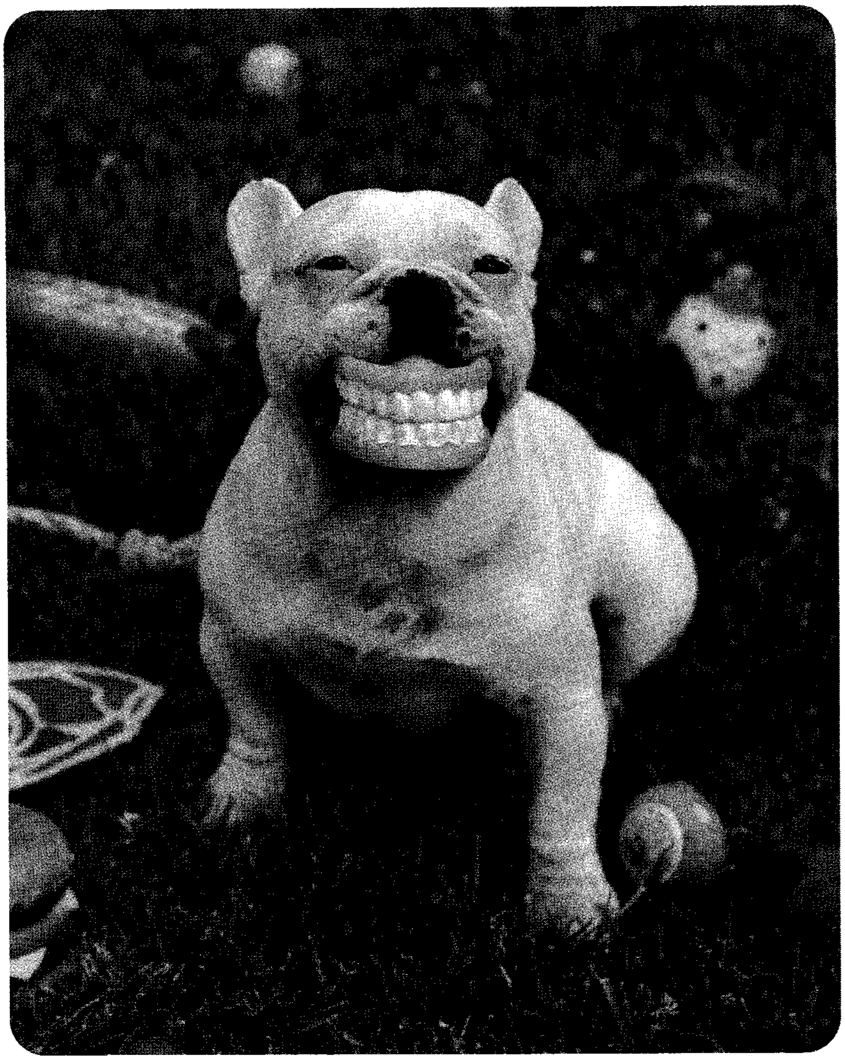

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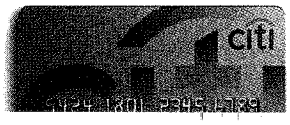

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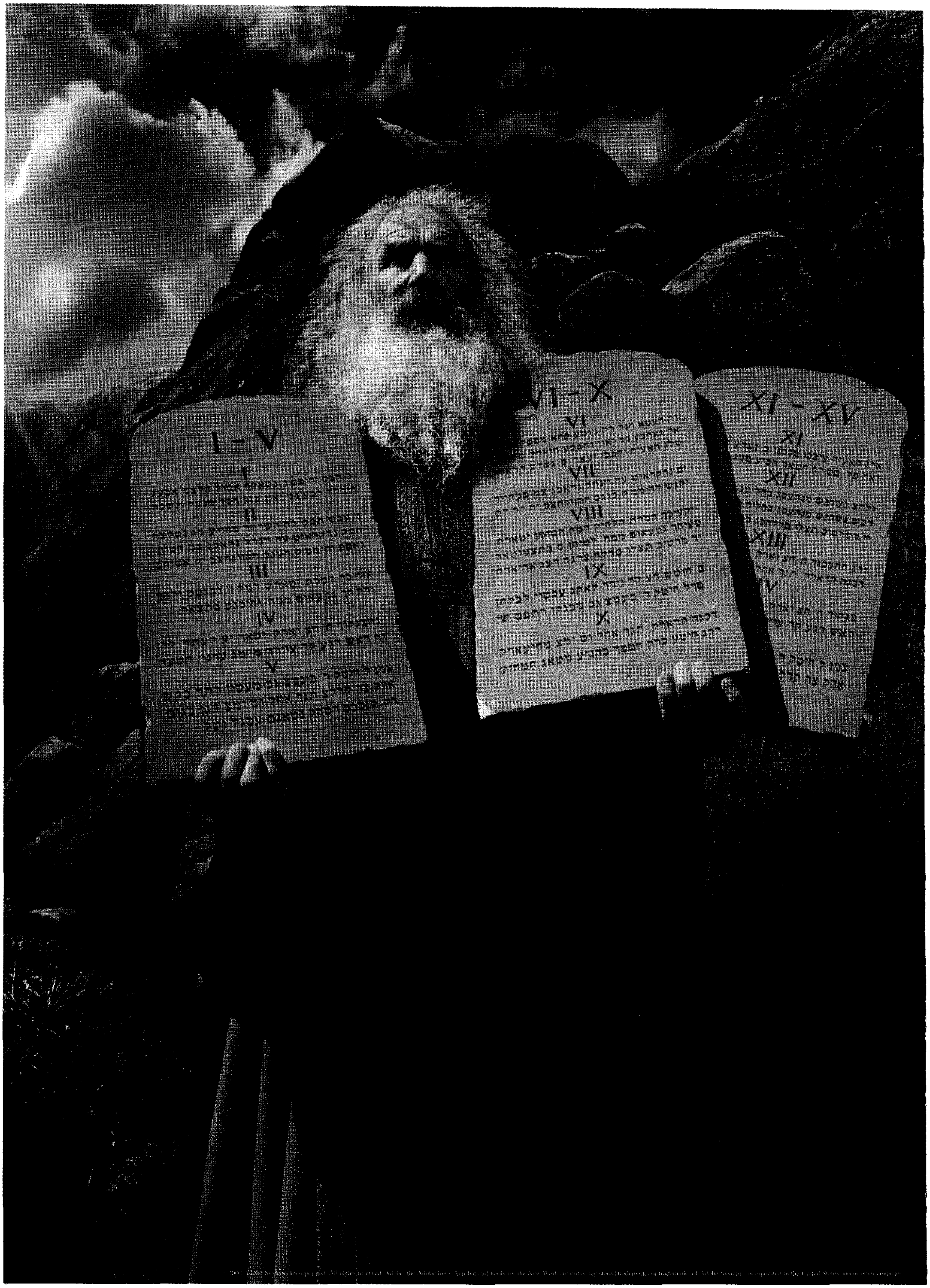
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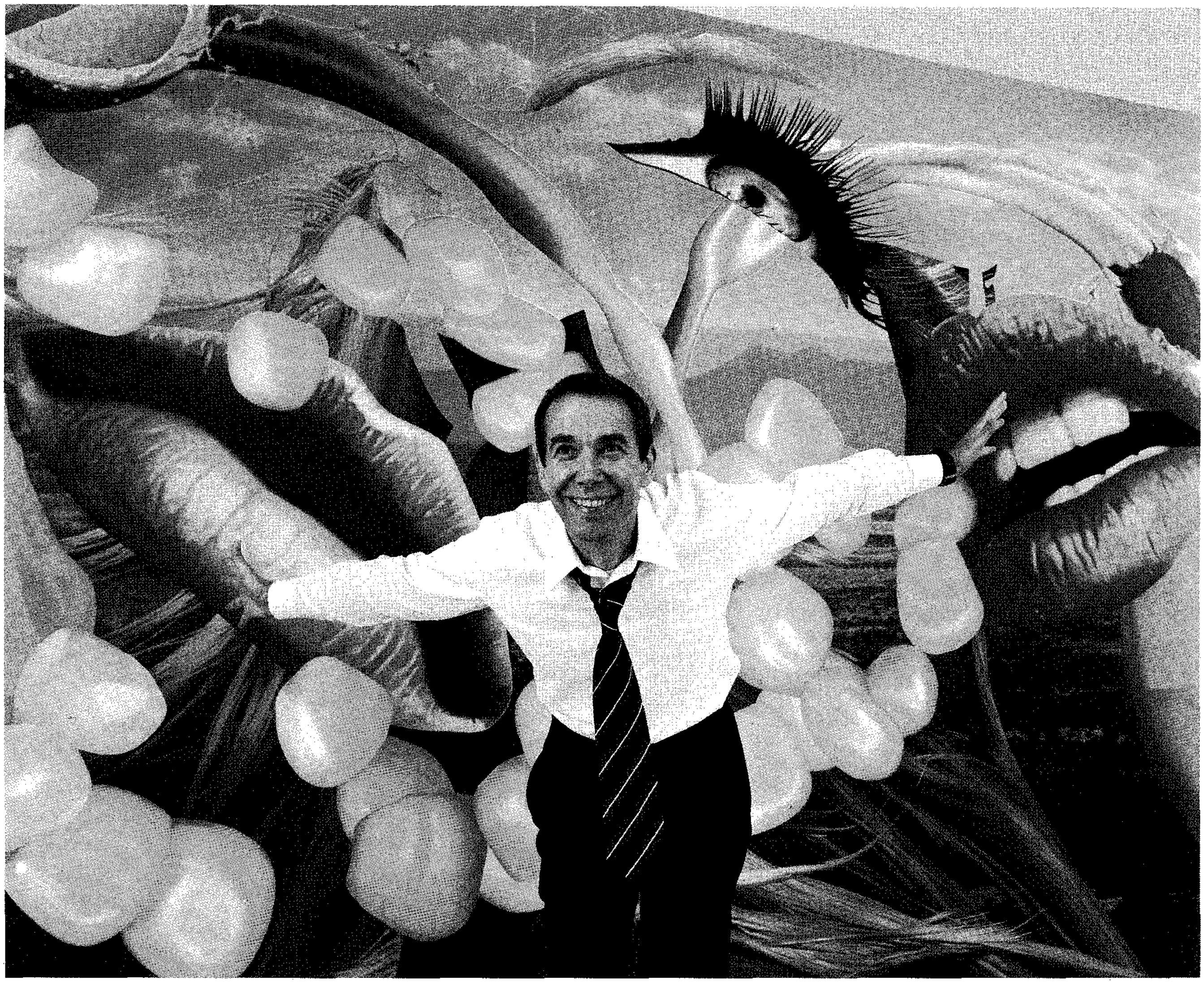

The artist Jeff Koons stands before his twelve-by-eight-foot "Lips," part of "Easyfun-Ethereal," his show at the Guggenheim.

JESSICA WYNNE

show, which also includes paintings and garden furniture. A kitschy pair of French-coiffed standard poodles by Louis Paul Jonas (intended as gatepost sculptures) could be the ancestors of Jeff Koons's puppy. The examples of furniture, reproductions from Mount Vernon and Edith Wharton's estate, are numerous and fetching but make the gallery feel a little like a showroom. Through Aug. 30. (James Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 535-5767.)

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

BANKS VIOLETTE

"Arroyo Grande," Violette's second show, is an elaborate memorial to a grisly incident, the 1995 murder of a California teen-ager by a trio of her heavy-metal-steeped classmates. The "boy" half of the gallery is ominously black, with fanged skulls, a customized drum kit, and crystals. The "girl" side is white and elegiac, dominated by a sculpture of a deformed weeping unicorn. Whether you find Violette's take on pop culture creepy or just callow, you have to admire his obsessive attention to metaphor and detail. He could grow up to be the Robert Smithson of goth. Through Aug. 23. (Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219.)

"AMERICAN STANDARD"

Like good sci-fi or film noir, this group show, subtitled "(Para)Normality and Everyday Life," retools familiar plot lines to deliver delicious shocks. The show—from Diane Arbus's ghoulish portrait of a Disneyland castle to Hiroshi Sugimoto's blank, glowing drive-in screen to Vija Celmins's enigmatic hot plate and Henry Wessel's forlornly eerie porch light—feels like a series of disturbing recurring dreams. The curator, Gregory Crewdson, is known primarily as a photographer of David Lynch-ish suburban tableaux that can be pushy and overheated. But in this role he zeroes in on Americana's garish, creepy nullity. Not many exhibitions could justify inclusion of a still from Spielberg's "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." Here, however, the vision of Richard Dreyfuss building Devil's Tower in his den seems right at home. Through Aug. 16. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

"INTO THE WOODS"

Sylvan settings, both real and magical, link the works in this wide-ranging and unusually appealing grab bag. The artists include well-known photographers (Weston, Cunningham, Meatyard), but the highlights are often small works by painters. Among these is a bold, odd portrait of a woman and chicken (by Ellen Phelan), a spiky macabre landscape (by Susanne Kuhn), and a bewitching drawing of a female centaur by the artist who is fast becoming the female equivalent of Tom of Finland, Hilary Harkness. Through Aug. 16. (Julie Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 627-2410.)

"KAGEKI METONYMICS"

What's likable about Japanese cartooning is its stylization, its reflexive anti-realism. What's less likable is on view here, in a concentrated dose of sexual violence that features more than a dozen *manga* artists with interchangeable fantasies. Basta on the *mangá,* please. Through Sept. 7. (Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600.)

"SOMETHING, ANYTHING?"

An enjoyable, very hip group show curated by the artist Nayland Blake that features raucous oddments in many mediums by dozens of contemporaries and a few honored dead. Some of the works are the kind of thing that artists make as jokes, for each other and for themselves; others evince the cracked sincerity of outsiders or the professional zaniness of comic-strip cartoonists (Ernie Bushmiller, George Herriman, Kaz). Serious works with wacky aspects (by Philip Guston, Ken Price, Cindy Sherman, and others) are dragooned into Blake's laughing academy to happily disorienting effect. The late Ray Johnson, the passive-aggressive "mail artist," seems to be the show's spectral guru, and Mike Kelley comes as no surprise. Reason? Taste? Never heard of them. But the installation, centered on a huge display console, is smart. In a back room, for the show's duration, a live d.j. spins vinyl from Blake's collection of more than three thousand LPs: that's a piece, too, titled "Ruins of a Sensibility, 1972-2002." Through Aug. 16. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.)

"YES, WE'RE EXCERPTS"

This themeless seven-artist selection offers some easygoing delights. One is Simone Huelser's photomural, which incorporates images of modernist office buildings into a kind of wry, handsome, Sean Scully-ish wallpaper. The other is Harrel Fletcher's "Sun Glints (New York)," a video that turns a tiny, incidental effect—glare bouncing off glass—into something weirdly watchable and resonant. Through Aug. 15. (Kreps, 516A W. 20th St. 741-8849.)

Short List

JOAN MITCHELL

Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 242-7727. Through Aug. 18.

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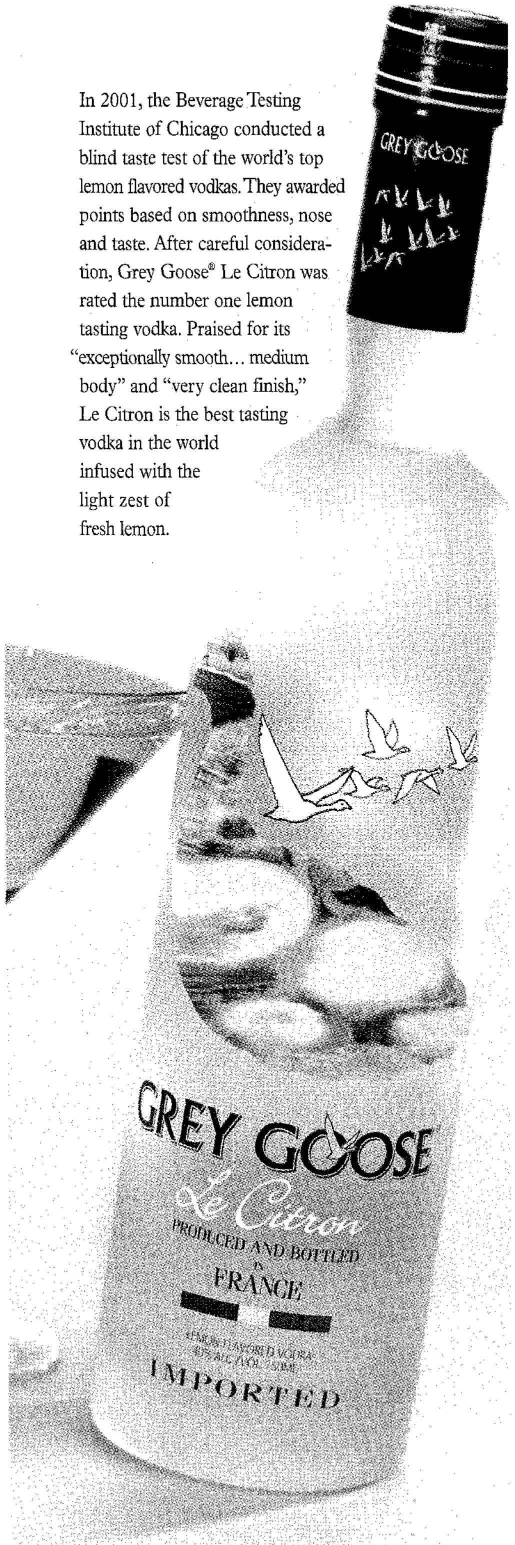

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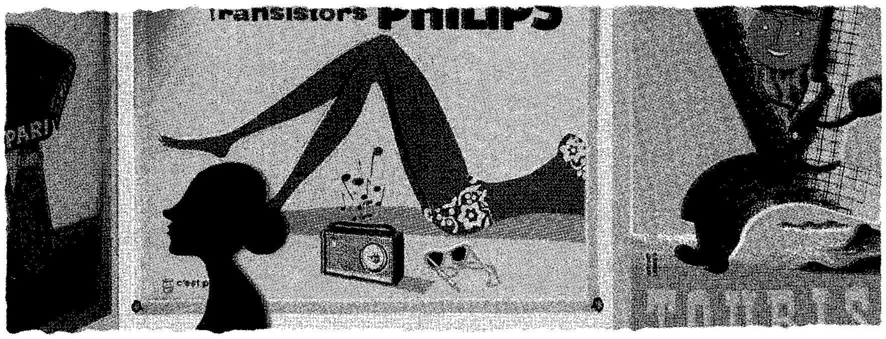
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Poster Children

Although the poster dealer Gail Chisholm has been in the business for three decades, you can still find her lurking around Paris on Wednesdays at 4 A.M., making a deal for a placard or two. "It's when they do the trade-over—you know, when they take down the hoardings. Sometimes they'll give you one of the old ones." Of course, the majority of the five thousand or so original posters at the **CHISHOLM GALLERY** (55 W. 17th St.; 6th floor; 243-8834) never graced metro or kiosk. They came from private collectors, who have been amassing posters since color lithography caused a sensation in the late nineteenth century, and from factories and warehouses, where, believe it or not, overlooked posters still turn up. "They're mostly French; the Italians were wonderfully dismissive of poster collecting. Their attitude was 'Posters? With our art?'" Chisholm says, surrounded by a hundred years' worth of ads for wine and bicycles and travel and trains, which are on display as part of the gallery's current exhibition, "Summer Pastimes."



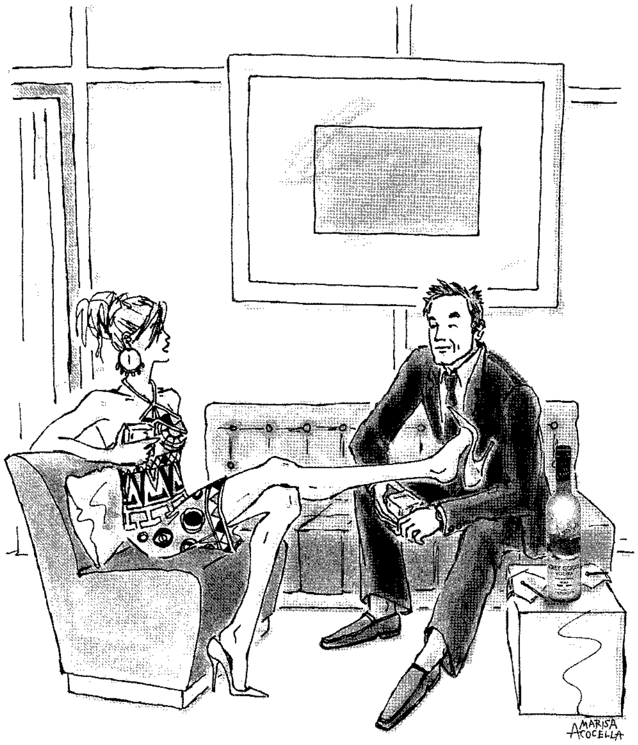
EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Asked to pick a favorite, Chisholm eventually settles on a turn-of-the-century advertisement for Absinthe Supérieure ($6,000) featuring a portly peasant settling down for a sip and a puff. (His pipe smoke spells out "C'est ma santé.") Pressed further, she points out a nineteen-fifties poster designed by David Kline for T.W.A. that depicts cat's-eye sunglasses floating over a highly abstract rendering of Collins Avenue in Miami Beach ($850).

At the former carriage house that is home to the **CARRANDI GALLERY** (138 W. 18th St.; 242-0710), the specialties are circus, magic, and Wild West posters. ("My husband was interested in magic," Susan Carrandi sighs, thinking back to how it all began.) The vast selection (nobody, it seems, has just a few posters for sale) includes a stupendous circa-1909 poster—Carrandi calls it a three-sheeter—for the Barnum & Bailey circus, featuring such enticements as pigs and clowns jumping through hoops and a man wrestling a bear ($3,800). Though the poster's message is in German, it was made in the U.S.—the troupe took their signs with them when they toured. Less detailed, perhaps, but equally inviting is a bathing beauty lounging on a placard for Palisades Park that extolls the virtues of the saltwater pool and advises potential visitors that nickel rides rise to a dime in the evening ($2,500).

If Carrandi and Chisolm's galleries are impressively tidy, **PHILIP WILLIAMS POSTERS** (534 LaGuardia Pl.; 677-7111) is a veritable fun house of ephemera. ("I don't think Phil has ever said no to a piece of paper," Chisolm says.) As if the fifty thousand posters on hand weren't enough, the shop also stocks such items as old *Life* magazines, dye cuts of banana splits, Southern folk-art animals, vintage Pernod ice buckets, and even an old mahogany barroom game from France that looks a little like a pool table with a highly distressed felt surface ($800). Though the setting is a bit chaotic, persistence pays off: among innumerable temptations is a late-fifties Intourist poster depicting two Russian nesting dolls rowing a Viking ship with the legend "Visitez l'URSS" ($550). A nineteen-twenties advertisement for the Hotel Beau Rivage in Nice ($450) has a black-and-white photograph of the premises and text that does its best to seduce the viewer with the promise of *ascenseurs, chauffage central,* and *concerts dans le grand hall.*

—*Lynn Yaeger*



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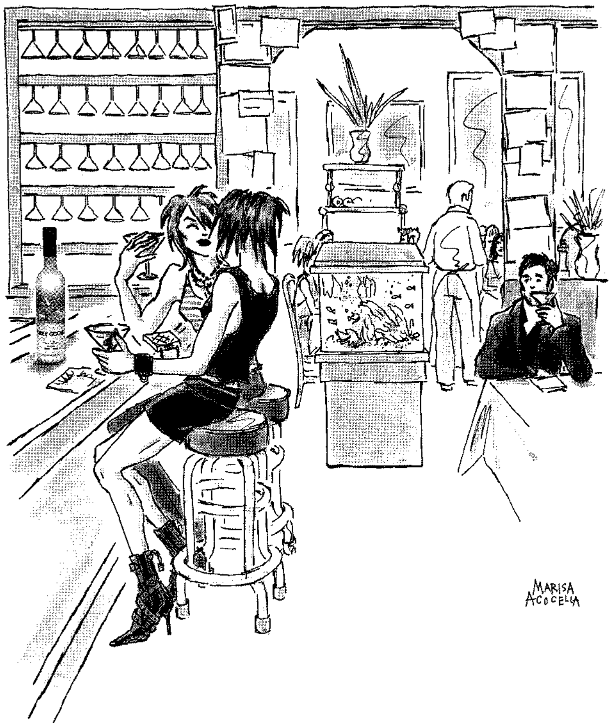

"He just ordered a Grey Goose Vodka. At least I'll respect him in the evening."

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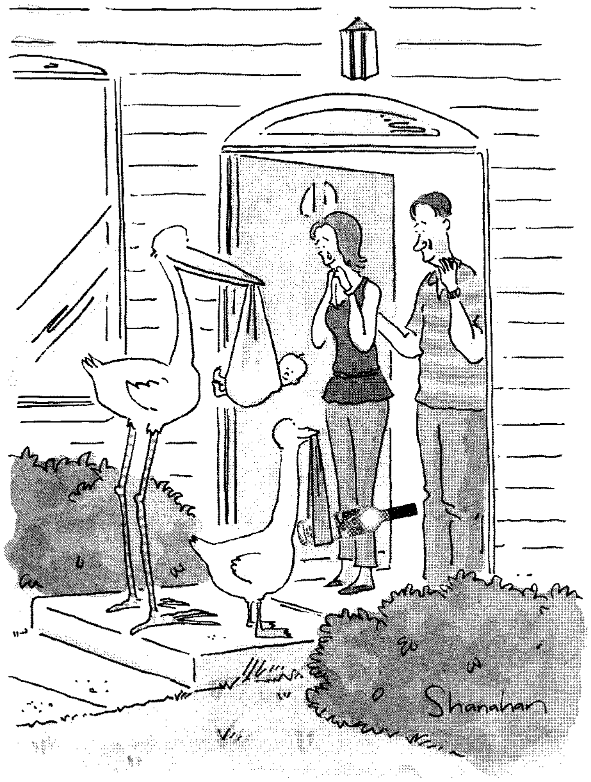

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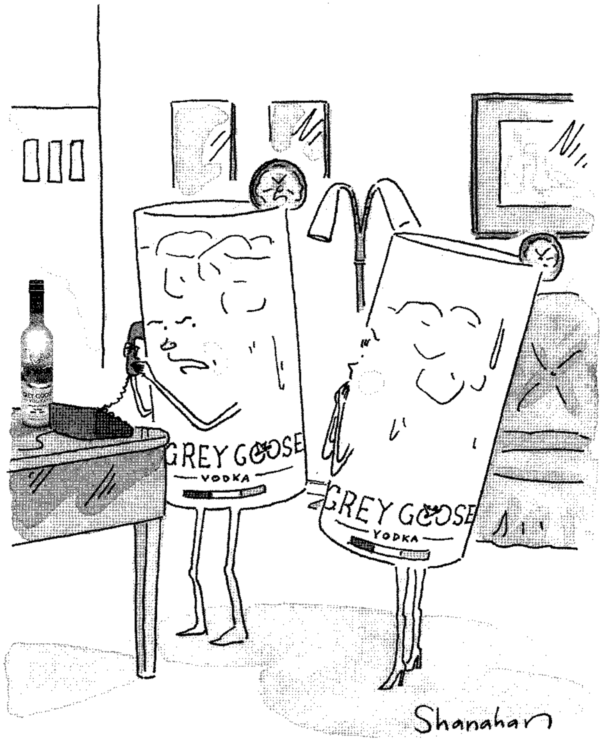
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"It's Martini, and he sounds shaken."

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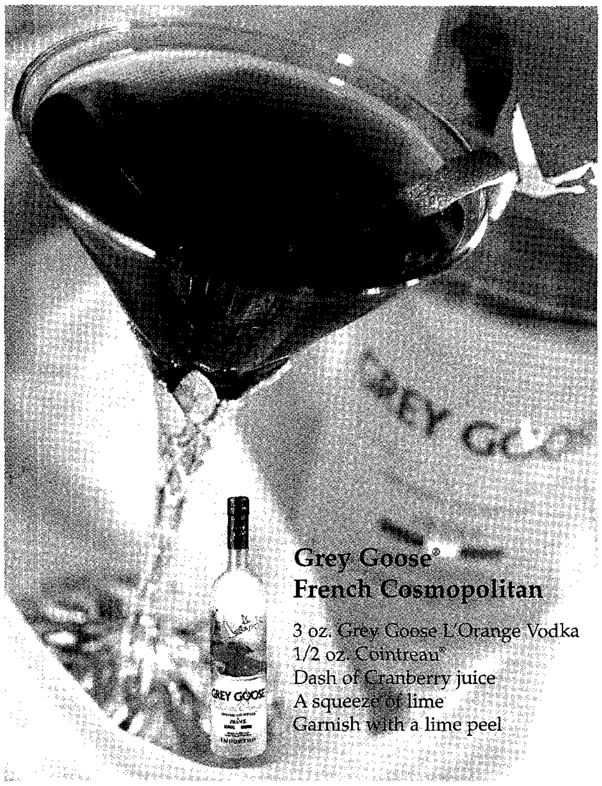

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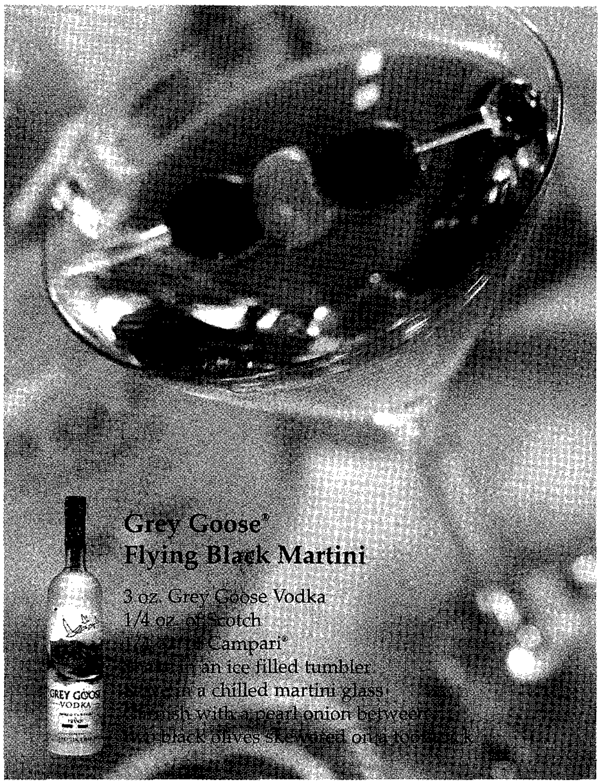

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3 oz. Grey Goose Vodka
1/4 oz. of Scotch
1/[illegible] Campari®
[illegible] in an ice filled tumbler
[illegible] a chilled martini glass
[illegible] with a pearl onion between
[illegible] black olives skewered on a toothpick

GREY GOOSE®
VODKA

Grey Goose®
Dirty Martini

3 oz. Grey Goose Vodka
A splash of Olive Juice
Serve in a chilled martini glass
Garnish with a [illegible]

GREY GOOSE®
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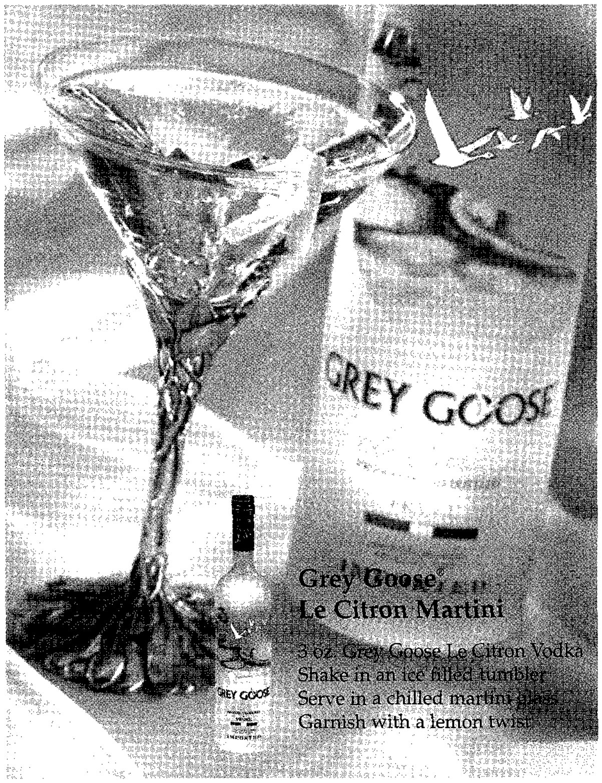

Grey Goose®
Le Citron Martini

3 oz. Grey Goose Le Citron Vodka
Shake in an ice filled tumbler
Serve in a chilled martini glass
Garnish with a lemon twist

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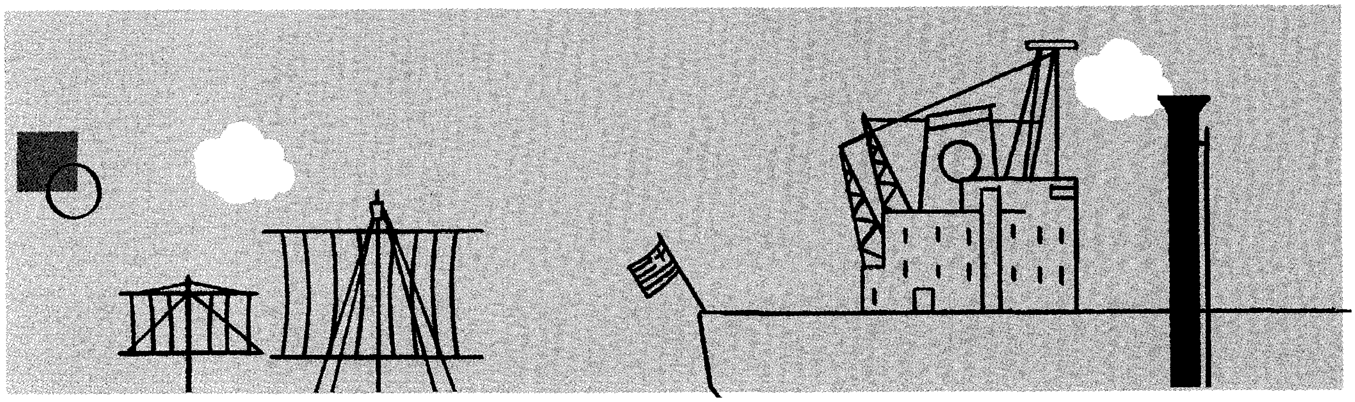
GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

SEBASTIAN BLANCK
Blanck's New York début looks perfectly natural in a Miyake showroom: the set of nudes behind transparent polka-dotted shower curtains has the same peekaboo appeal as the designer's slinky outfits. The work's distinctive abstract overlay coyly obscures the nude forms, but it's easy to see who's scrubbing where. In one image, the perspective has cleverly shifted so that the artist looks out from inside the shower into a changing room—which perhaps explains the setting of the show, in the midst of crinkly Miyake silks. Through Aug. 31. (119 Hudson St. 226-0100.)



"The Greeks and the Sea" features models of Hellenic seacraft, from Odysseus to Onassis, at the Foundation for Hellenic Culture.

LAURENT CILLUFFO

"RING OF REMEMBRANCE"
The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the ad-hoc state and city agency charged with the World Trade Center rebuilding efforts, displays land-use proposals and maquettes of six plans for the site alongside photographs of the location from 1949 to the present. A three-dimensional animation of the plans plays continuously, and two tables (where viewers can write comments—the point of the exhibit) surround a model of Lower Manhattan with a transparent re-creation of the absent towers. Through Aug. 30. (Federal Hall, 26 Wall St. 825-6888.)

GALLERIES–QUEENS

NINA KATCHADOURIAN
New Yorkers are used to the sirens of their habitat. But what if car alarms were just another species of organic song? From this quixotic premise comes Nina Katchadourian's public-art project "Natural Car Alarms," sponsored by the Sculpture Center and migrating through Queens, from MOMA QNS to the Sculpture Center, Socrates Sculpture Park, and P.S. 1. Katchadourian's rigged cars are identifiable only by their sunny-yellow bumper stickers and windshield decals of birds. But once the flock starts squawking, chirping, and shrieking, heads snap around in double and triple takes. Through Sept. 22. (For dates and locations, call 718-361-1750, or visit sculpture-center.org.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

VIGGO MORTENSEN
After wading through this group of meditative images of dogs running or growling at each other and of children covered in home-drawn tattoos, one shouldn't be faulted for jumping at the sight of a pointy-eared elf in a forest glen. Mortensen, a would-be Renaissance man who writes poems, makes paintings, takes photographs, and plays hunks in the movies, is best known for the role of the stern Aragorn, a rare human in the recent film "Lord of the Rings." In fact, his Middle Earthling photos, taken on location in New Zealand, are some of the most affecting in the show—a little bit creepy and nicely surprising. Through Aug. 23. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 989-7600.)

"THE BLURRED IMAGE"
In homage to the hazy days of summer, the gallery installs an elegant selection of painterly (read: blurry) photographs, a canny mix of vintage prints from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century and contemporary work. An exquisite black-and-white image by Eugène Atget (soft focus transforms a simple staircase into a heavenly ascent) hangs next to a cibachrome diptych by Seton Smith of an ornate stairwell. No show devoted to the out of focus would be complete without a piece by Gerhard Richter—the undisputed king of smear—represented here by a lush ravine that threatens to swallow up the long-limbed figure strolling away from the lens. Through Aug. 16. (Winston Wächter Mayer, 39 E. 78th St. 327-2526.)

"OBSCURE DESTINIES: PHOTOGRAPHY IN LATIN AMERICA, 1860-2000"
All the work here seems to traffic in magic realism, even the photographs of those who worked before the term was coined: Désiré Charnay (1828-1915) shows jungles disgorging Mayan ruins; modernists Tina Modotti and Manuel Alvarez Bravo record the clash of twentieth-century and traditional Mexican culture; and several contemporary artists glibly tweak religion and hitch themselves a little too securely to the magic-realism bandwagon, although Vik Muniz's picture of a soccer team—drawn in chocolate syrup on glass then photographed—is still slick, yet smart. Through Aug. 22. (Cook, 1063 Madison Ave., at 80th St. 737-3440.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—**"George Tice: Urban Landscapes."** Since 1967, George Tice has used a view camera to inventory the urban and suburban landscapes of his native New Jersey. The rich black-and-white prints (Tice was Steichen's printer) are reminiscent of Berenice Abbot's "Changing New York" work but more in synch with the sensibility of Robert Adams, his contemporary. Tice documents the dawn of the chain-store era, showing marquees that have lost their twinkling lights and chrome-plated diners that don't quite shine anymore beside butcher shops and gas stations out of Norman Rockwell. In downtown Newark, Tice composed a photograph so that an old church spire still (but only barely) rises above the young skyscrapers of downtown commerce. ♦ **"Manual: Two Worlds—the Collaboration of Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom"** and **"Dust to DNA: Kevin Clark and Mikey Flowers 9/11."** All shows through Sept. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

JOHN COFFER
Melville, 213 Water St. 748-8600.
Through Oct. 10.

HARRY LAPOW
Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 741-4764.
Through Aug. 16.

"BYSTANDER"
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.
Through Aug. 23.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Aug. 15 at 8, Aug. 17 at 1:30, and Aug. 25 at 2: Mark Adamo's **"Little Women,"** with Jennifer Dudley, Sandra Piques Eddy, Joshua Hopkins, and Jake Gardner; John DeMain conducts. ♦ Aug. 16 and Aug. 24 at 8 and Aug. 19 and Aug. 27 at 2: **"Dialogues of the Carmelites,"** Poulenc's masterpiece about an order of nuns under siege during the French Revolution—perhaps the only opera that addresses the complexities of faith—has never seemed more potent than it does in Tazewell Thompson's eloquently lit and measured staging, which maintains a sure grip right up to the guillotine's final, awful *thwack!* The uniformly strong cast, conducted by Stewart Robertson, includes Maria Kanyova, Joyce Castle, Sarah Coburn, Robynne Redmon, Jason Collins, and the redoubtable English soprano Dame Anne Evans, as the plainspoken prioress, Madame Lidoine. ♦ Aug. 17 and Aug. 23 at 8 and Aug. 20 and Aug. 26 at 2: Robin Guarino's production of **"Pagliacci"** and **"Cavalleria Rusticana,"** featuring Marie Plette, John Mac Master, and Ned Barth in the first opera and Eugenie Grunewald, Keith Ikaia-Purdy, and Brian Montgomery in the second; Robertson. ♦ Aug. 18 at 2, Aug. 22 at 8, and Aug. 24 at 1:30: James Robinson's chilly, postmodern production (broken mirrors, etc.) of Haydn's **"Orlando Paladino"** fails to shed much light on why this tuneful but dramatically weak setting of an Italian Renaissance tale about a mad knight's quest for a faithless lady was once so widely performed. Guido Johannes Rumstadt conducts an attractive cast, led by Paul Austin Kelly, Lisa Saffer, James Valenti, Brenda Patterson, and Troy Cook. In English. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255. These are the final performances.)

CONCERTS IN TOWN

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
After the cancellation of nearly all the events involving the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra (and three other concerts besides), the remaining festival might be called Hardly Handel, or something equally provisional. But each of the concerts promises some memorable moments. Aug. 14-17 at 8: The Mark Morris Dance Group performs its renowned reinvention of Handel's "L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato," a "pastoral ode" based on poems by Milton. San Francisco's Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, conducted by Nicholas McGegan, provides the music, along with the vocal solo-

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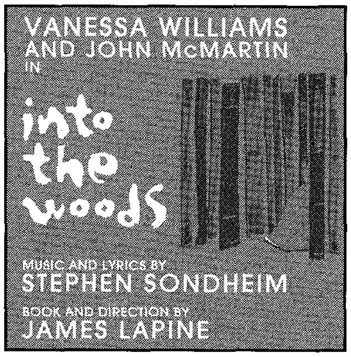

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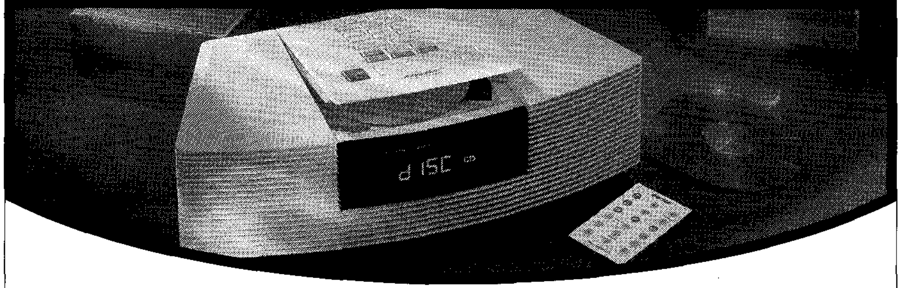

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ists Christine Brandes, Dominique Labelle, John Mark Ainsley, and Philip Cutlip and the Dessoff Choirs. (New York State Theatre. For more information, see Dance.) ♦ Aug. 18 at 5: "Esther," based on a Biblical drama by Racine, may not be the most renowned of the Handel oratorios, but it has the distinction of being the composer's first—the foundation stone of the entire English oratorio tradition. Paul McCreesh and his Gabrieli Consort and Players make their Mostly Mozart début with the piece, as do their solo singers, Carolyn Sampson, Paul Agnew, Daniel Taylor, Roderick Williams, and Charles Daniels. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500.) ♦ Aug. 20-21 at 8: A special, free concert by the Mostly Mozart Orchestra, conducted by Louis Langrée. Tickets (up to two per person) will be available at the Avery Fisher Hall box office beginning on Aug. 19.

BARGEMUSIC
Aug. 15 at 7:30 and Aug. 18 at 4: The pianist Naoko Sugiyama, the cellist Ronald Thomas, and others perform two concerts of Dvořák, Mozart, and Mendelssohn (the Piano Quartet in F Minor). ♦ Aug. 23-24 at 7:30: The flutist Julia Scolnick, the pianist Randall Hodgkinson, and the cellist Sarah Carter play a program of music by Haydn, Weber, Prokofiev (the Sonata in D Major), and Elliott Carter. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

LOCRIAN CHAMBER PLAYERS
Works less than a decade old—the only kind the Locrians choose—by two composers who celebrate the "indigenous" music of their cultures, America's William Bolcom (three works, including "Celestial Dinner Music") and South Africa's Kevin Volans (the U.S. première of "Akrodha"). (10th Floor Performance Space, Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. Aug. 15 at 8. No tickets required.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
The City Island chamber-music series hosts two brunchtime recitals of music for violin and piano by Brahms, Debussy, and others; the performers include the violinists Azmira Woodward-Page and Janet Sung. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. Aug. 18 and Aug. 25 at 12:30. Tickets at the door.)

"THE EXISTENTIAL ACCORDION"
William Schimmel's three days of master classes have a decidedly Parisian slant, with discussions of such topics as "The Musette Américaine" and presentations of pieces made in homage to luminaries like Serge Gainsbourg, Jacques Derrida, and Jerry Lewis. The concerts—which include performances by Schimmel, "the great" Carmen Carozza, and many other buskers extraordinaire—will close with a reception/salon that will attempt to answer such burning questions as "What is this thing called the accordion?" and "Why do we play at all?" (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43 W. 13th St. 876-0827. Aug. 23-25, with master classes at 3 and concerts at 7.)

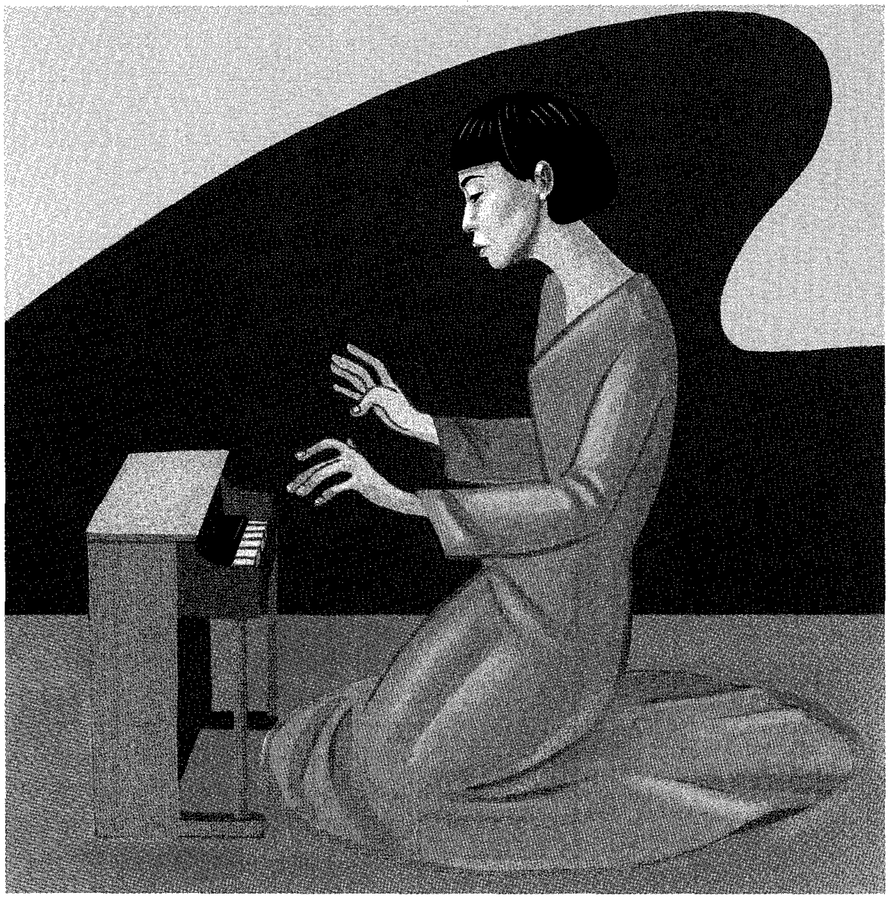
CONCERTS OUT OF TOWN

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The major summer festivals wrap up their seasons. Aug. 14 at 8: The peaceful music of Lou Harrison ("Songs in the Forest") is the lead-in for the first of the week's concerts, which also features works by Beethoven and Schumann (the Piano Quintet). The ensemble for the week includes the flutist Marya Martin, the violinist Todd Phillips, and the pianist Phillip Bush. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church.) ♦ Aug. 16 at 7: Alan Alda is the guest for a special all-Mozart concert, in which he'll read a selection of the composer's poignant and revealing letters (which could make up an evening's entertainment all by themselves). (Channing Daughters Winery, 1927 Scuttlehole Rd. Wine tastings and refreshments are included.) ♦ Aug. 18 at 6:30: Music by Lukas Foss (the picaresque "Three American Pieces") highlights a concert also featuring works by Dohnányi and Beethoven. (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church. 631-537-6368.)

COOPERSTOWN CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
This relative newcomer to the crowded Northeastern scene brings world-class performers to

the down-home setting of a working nineteenth-century farm; the concerts take place in a converted stone barn, with side doors that open to the breeze on clement nights. Aug. 14 at 8: The Tokyo String Quartet provides the first of the festival's four remaining concerts, performing quartets by Schubert, Smetana, and Dutilleux ("Ainsi la Nuit"). (Farmers' Museum, Cooperstown, N.Y. 888-547-1450.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Charles Dutoit conducts the festival's final classical concerts. Aug. 14: "A Tchaikovsky Spectacular," with Vadim Repin performing the Violin Concerto and Mischa Maisky playing solo cello in the "Variations on a Rococo Theme." ♦ Aug. 16: Contemporary music makes its only appearance on the schedule with James MacMillan's "Veni, Veni Emmanuel," a bright and brilliant percussion concerto composed in 1992 for the virtuoso drummer Evelyn Glennie, who plays it here. The program also includes music by Mendelssohn (the Violin Concerto, with Joshua Bell) and Ravel. ♦ Aug. 17: David Kim, the orchestra's concertmaster, performs the Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1 on a program that winds up the season with Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. (Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Saratoga, N.Y. 518-587-3330. All concerts begin at 8:15.)

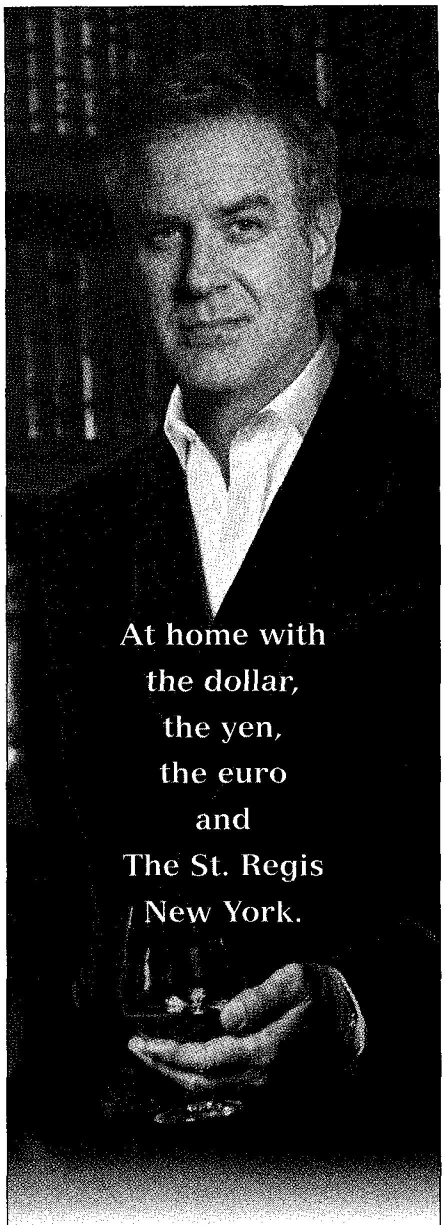


Margaret Leng Tan plays music by John Cage at Maverick on July 24.

ALISON SEIFFER

TANGLEWOOD
The festival closes its classical season with a whirl of concerts; here are some highlights. Aug. 14 at 8:30: Martin Katz's crystalline accompaniments will back up the radiant soprano of Karita Mattila, who sings a recital of Schubert, Sibelius, Mahler, and others. ♦ Aug. 15 at 8:30: The Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio plays music by Beethoven, Brahms, and Leon Kirchner. ♦ Aug. 16 at 8:30: In the first of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's final concerts, James Conlon conducts music by Dvořák (the Symphony No. 7) and Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 25, with Emanuel Ax). ♦ Aug. 17 at 8:30: Kaija Saariaho, whose silken scores are as haunting as they are complex, is represented on the first of Robert Spano's two B.S.O. concerts by "Château de l'Âme," featuring the soprano Valdine Anderson. Music by Barber (the Violin Concerto, with Miriam Fried) and Sibelius completes the program. ♦ Aug. 18 at 2:30: Neville Marriner conducts symphonies by Mozart and Tchaikovsky (the "Polish") and Bruch's First Violin Concerto (with Vadim Repin). ♦ Aug. 22 at 8:30: Spano conducts a repeat of Osvaldo Golijov's smash hit, "La Pasión Según San Marcos" (the B.S.O. gave the U.S. première in 2001), with some of the original Latin-American singers and musicians for whom the composer created it. ♦ Aug. 23 at 8:30: James Conlon conducts Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 17 (with Peter Serkin) and the Symphonies Nos. 36 ("Linz") and 39. ♦ Aug. 25 at 2:30: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the singers Christine Brewer, Jill Grove, Stanford Olsen, Nathan Berg, and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. The conductor is Roger Norrington. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL:
"MAHLER AND HIS WORLD"
In its technical complexity, epic scope, and narrative richness, Mahler's music formed a universe unto itself. Leon Botstein's final weekend of concerts, pre-concert panels, and film screenings puts it into the context of works by Mahler's rivals and followers. Some highlights: Aug. 16 at 8: A performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 6, preceded by works by Strauss, Wolf, and Felix Weingartner, a fellow composer-conductor whose music has been ignored by subsequent generations. Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra. (Festival Tent.) ♦ Aug. 18 at 1:30: A concert of chamber music by Zemlinksy, Webern, Schoenberg (the String Quartet No. 2), and other Young Turks of Viennese modernism, performed by the clarinettist Laura Flax, the cellist Robert Martin, the pianist Siiri Schütz, and others. (Olin Auditorium.) ♦ Aug. 18 at 5: Botstein conducts the A.S.O., the New York Virtuoso Singers, the Newark Boys Chorus, and a host of vocal soloists in the Symphony No. 8



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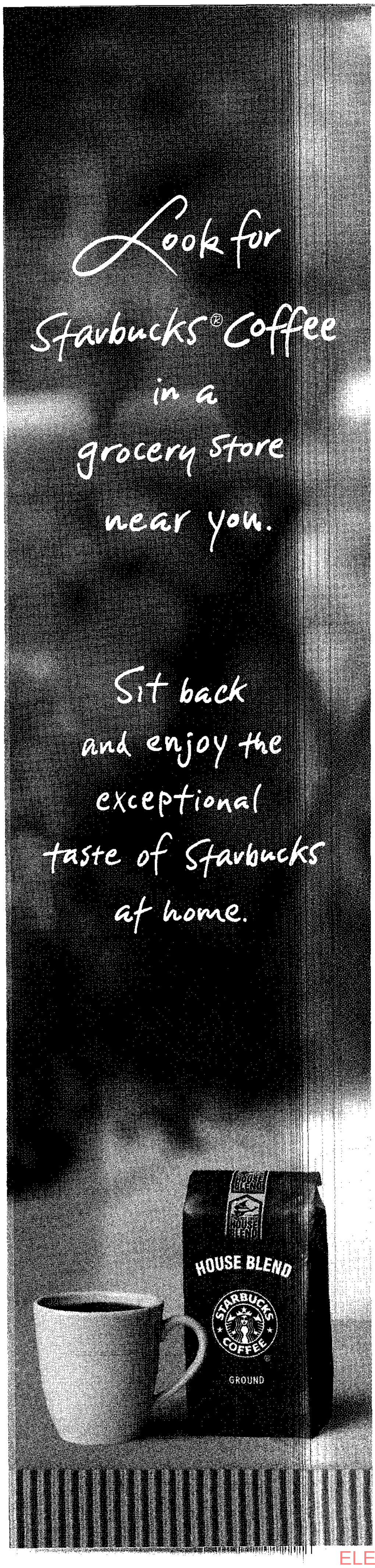


(the so-called "Symphony of a Thousand"). (Festival Tent.) (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7456. For a complete listing of concerts, go to the festival's Web site, www.bard.edu/bmf.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL
The chamber-music series concludes its summer concerts. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 16-17 at 8:30 and Aug. 18 at 2:30.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The Tokyo String Quartet (with the pianist Joan Panetti) rounds out its Norfolk concerts with an evening of Haydn, Brahms, and Joan Tower. (Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. Aug. 17 at 8.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
Aug. 17 at 8: A concert tribute to the late Robert Starer, a long-beloved figure in Woodstock's musical life. His partner, the novelist Gail Godwin (whose literary style influenced the forms of Starer's chromatic and rhythmically driving music), has written a libretto for an evening of performances by the pianist Justin Kolb, the mezzo-soprano Barbara Hardgrave, and others. ♦ Aug. 18 at 3: The pianist Ruth Laredo plays music by Chopin, Brahms, and Robert and Clara Schumann. ♦ Aug. 24 at 8: Margaret Leng Tan, the princess of the toy piano, performs "Through the Silence: John Cage and Beyond," a concert honoring the scandalous première performance of "4'33"," which took place at Maverick in 1952. Also included is music by Cowell, Glass, Lucier, and others, some of which she'll perform on a standard instrument, both plain and prepared. (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The Blair String Quartet, with the pianist Amy Dorfman, plays music by Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann (the Piano Quintet). (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 25 at 3.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"CONVERGENCE: SOME PARADES FOR CHARLIE'S DAD"
Growing up at the end of the nineteenth century, the American composer Charles Ives was heavily influenced by his father, George, a small-town eccentric who had been the youngest Union bandleader in the Civil War. George would pull such stunts as making his son perform a song in one key and sing it at the same time in another, or having a pair of marching bands cross paths while playing. The composer and Wesleyan University professor Neely Bruce, along with a colleague of his, the organist Ronald Ebrecht, has gathered a quartet of marching bands, ten vocal choruses, a samba band, two fife-and-drums corps, and some two dozen other ensembles to expand upon George's musical experiments. The parades, which will run on the blocks surrounding Lincoln Center before converging simultaneously on the Fountain Plaza, are "a tribute to the history of American music," Bruce says. They are also a tribute to planning: fully aware that the event is too large to rehearse, the organizers have prepared by walking the route with a metronome. (Aug. 18 at 4:30. For more information, call 875-5108.)

"LA CASITA: A HOME FOR THE HEART"
More than twenty poets and musicians from Latin and Central America, Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States perform their work. (North Plaza, Lincoln Center. Aug. 24-25, starting at 1:30. For more information, call 875-5108.)

MORE READINGS
Aug. 18 at 6: In an evening titled "Enduring Revolution," Maureen Holms, an editor at the literary journal *NYCBigCityLit*, joins her fellow-writers for essays and stories about Cuba. The twelve-string guitarist David Francis provides the music. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 989-9319.) ♦ Aug. 21 at 7:30: Dennis McNally, who became the Grateful Dead's official historian in 1980, reads from "A Long Strange Trip," his account of the group's transformation from Haight-Ashbury house band to dorm-room staple. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 601-1000.)

BOOK CURRENTS

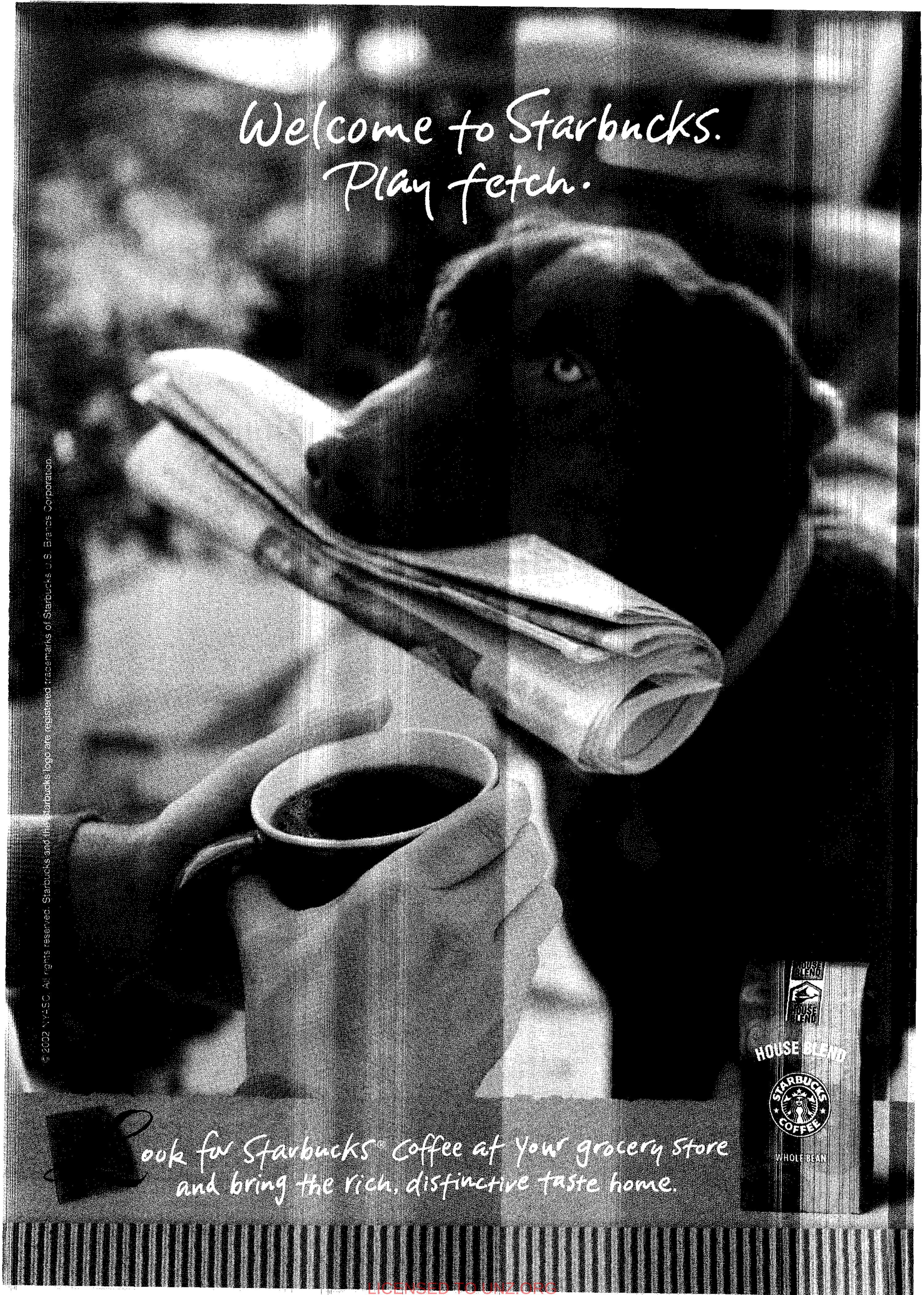
Spies Like Them

TONY MILLIONAIRE

Assigned to a remote outpost of the Asian subcontinent in the spring of 1987, Jonna Goeser, an expert in clandestine photography, disguise, and false documentation—she can facilitate a "quick ethnic change" on demand—finds herself entangled in some dangerous business. **SPY DUST** (Atria), the memoir she wrote with Antonio J. Mendez—first her boss in Technical Operations, then her husband—details the Russians' latest anti-espionage technologies, including a mysterious light-sensitive tracking powder, insect sex pheromones, and clairvoyants, and double agents like Robert Hanssen and Edward Lee Howard. (The Mendezes were helped by the true-crime writer Bruce Henderson.) Officially, Jonna's mission is a "smoking-bolt operation" designed to relieve the K.G.B. of an important communications device, but it's actually a ruse to distract attention from the agency's exfiltration of a K.G.B. officer about to be unmasked as a spy for the Americans. The book, which passed the C.I.A.'s publication-review board, makes a post-September-11th case for spooks—reminding us that the most successful operations are the ones we never hear about.

With her black beret, bright lipstick, and cum-laude Barnard-girl-next-door persona, Judith Coplon was a celebrity from the moment of her highly controversial arrest on espionage charges in 1949. Was she the next Mata Hari? If so, some reporters found her disappointingly unexotic: "about as sinister as Louisa May Alcott," one wrote. Or was she just an industrious Department of Justice employee working on a novel about her experiences? **THE SPY WHO SEDUCED AMERICA** (Invisible Cities), by Marcia and Thomas Mitchell, examines both the farcical and disturbing aspects of Coplon's case.

—*Dana Goodyear*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MOVIES OPENING

THE ADVENTURES OF PLUTO NASH
Eddie Murphy stars as a night-club owner on the moon, in a comedy set in the year 2087. Opening Aug. 16.

ALL MY LOVED ONES
A drama based on the true story of an English stockbroker (Rupert Graves) who saved Czech Jewish children from the Holocaust. In Czech. Opening Aug. 16. (Quad Cinema.)

AMY'S ORGASM
In a comedy she wrote and directed, Julie Davis plays a self-help author who counsels women that they don't need men and then develops a crush on a sexist radio shock jock. Opening Aug. 23.

BLUE CRUSH
A young woman (Kate Bosworth) trains to become a champion surfer in Maui but loses her form when she starts dating a pro quarterback, in a teen movie directed by John Stockwell. Opening Aug. 16.

HOW I KILLED MY FATHER
A drama in which the comfortable bourgeois life of a Parisian doctor (Charles Berling) falls apart when his father (Michel Bouquet) returns from Africa. In French. Opening Aug. 23.

I'M GOING HOME
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Aug. 14. (Film Forum.)

THE ISLE
An erotic drama that begins when a prostitute working the fishing shacks on a remote lake prevents a man from committing suicide. Kim Ki-Duk directed. In Korean. Opening Aug. 23. (Cinema Village.)

THE LAST KISS
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Aug. 16. (Sunshine Cinema.)

MOSTLY MARTHA
The perfectly prepared life of a head chef (Martina Gedeck) at a star restaurant falls apart when a new Italian sous-chef shows up. In German. Opening Aug. 16.

ONE HOUR PHOTO
Robin Williams plays a photography-lab employee who becomes obsessed with a family whose pictures he develops. Written and directed by Mark Romanek. Opening Aug. 21. (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

POSSESSION
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Aug. 16.

SATIN ROUGE
The unlikely journey of a widowed Tunisian seamstress who becomes a cabaret dancer. Raja Amari directed. In Arabic. Opening Aug. 23.

SERVING SARA
Matthew Perry plays a process server who gets mixed up in a divorce between a Texas cattle rancher (Bruce Campbell) and his wife (Elizabeth Hurley). Opening Aug. 23.

SIMONE
Andrew Niccol wrote and directed this satire in which a movie producer (Al Pacino) creates a computer-simulated actress that becomes an international star. With Catherine Keener. Opening Aug. 23.

UNDISPUTED
Walter Hill's drama about a world heavyweight champion (Ving Rhames) who is sent to prison, where he challenges the best boxer in the big house (Wesley Snipes). Opening Aug. 23.

FILM NOTES

AUSTIN POWERS IN GOLDMEMBER
Comedic comfort food. After a spectacular opening salvo (loaded with cameos), the third installment of the swinging-spy shag-ology settles into familiar terrain: Dr. Evil (one of the four roles played by Mike Myers) doing his nefarious best to take over the world. Once again, Myers displays his gift for mimicry and his ability to mix it up with a midget. His cast includes an electric Beyoncé Knowles as his female sidekick and a dapper yet underused Michael Caine as his dad; they're ebullient foils to the script's formless frenzy.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

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BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Jean Cocteau's first full-length movie, from 1946, is perhaps the most sensuously elegant of all filmed fairy tales. As a child escapes from everyday family life to the magic of a storybook, so, in the film, Beauty's farm, with its Vermeer simplicity, fades in intensity as we are caught up in the Gustave Doré extravagance of the Beast's enchanted landscape. In Christian Bérard's makeup, Jean Marais is a magnificent Beast; Beauty's self-sacrifice to him holds no more horror than a satisfying romantic fantasy should have. The transformation of the Beast into Prince Charming is ambiguous—what we have gained cannot quite take the place of what we have lost. (When shown the film, Greta Garbo is reported to have said at the end, "Give me back my Beast.") The delicate Josette Day is, quite properly, Beauty.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; starting Aug. 16.)

BLOOD WORK
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, Sutton 1 and 2, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

CALLE 54
Fernando Trueba's exhilarating celebration of Latin jazz makes viewers feel the music from the inside out. He gathered some of his favorite musicians at a recording studio on Manhattan's Fifty-fourth Street and filmed them so unself-consciously and fluidly it's as if he cued his cameras to the players' seemingly telepathic brain waves. It's hard to think of another musical duet captured as deftly on film as the pianist Bebo Valdés and the bassist Israel "Cachao" Lopez playing "Lágrimas Negras" here. Trueba allows you to experience the music in all its vibrant complexity and its physicality, whether jazz artists and dancers are literally fusing flamencos or mambos and bebop, or pianist Eliane Elias is working the pedals barefoot. The talent roster includes Tito Puente, Gato Barbieri, Chano Dominguez, Michel Camilo, and Jerry González and his Fort Apache Band.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 18, Aug. 20, and Aug. 22.)

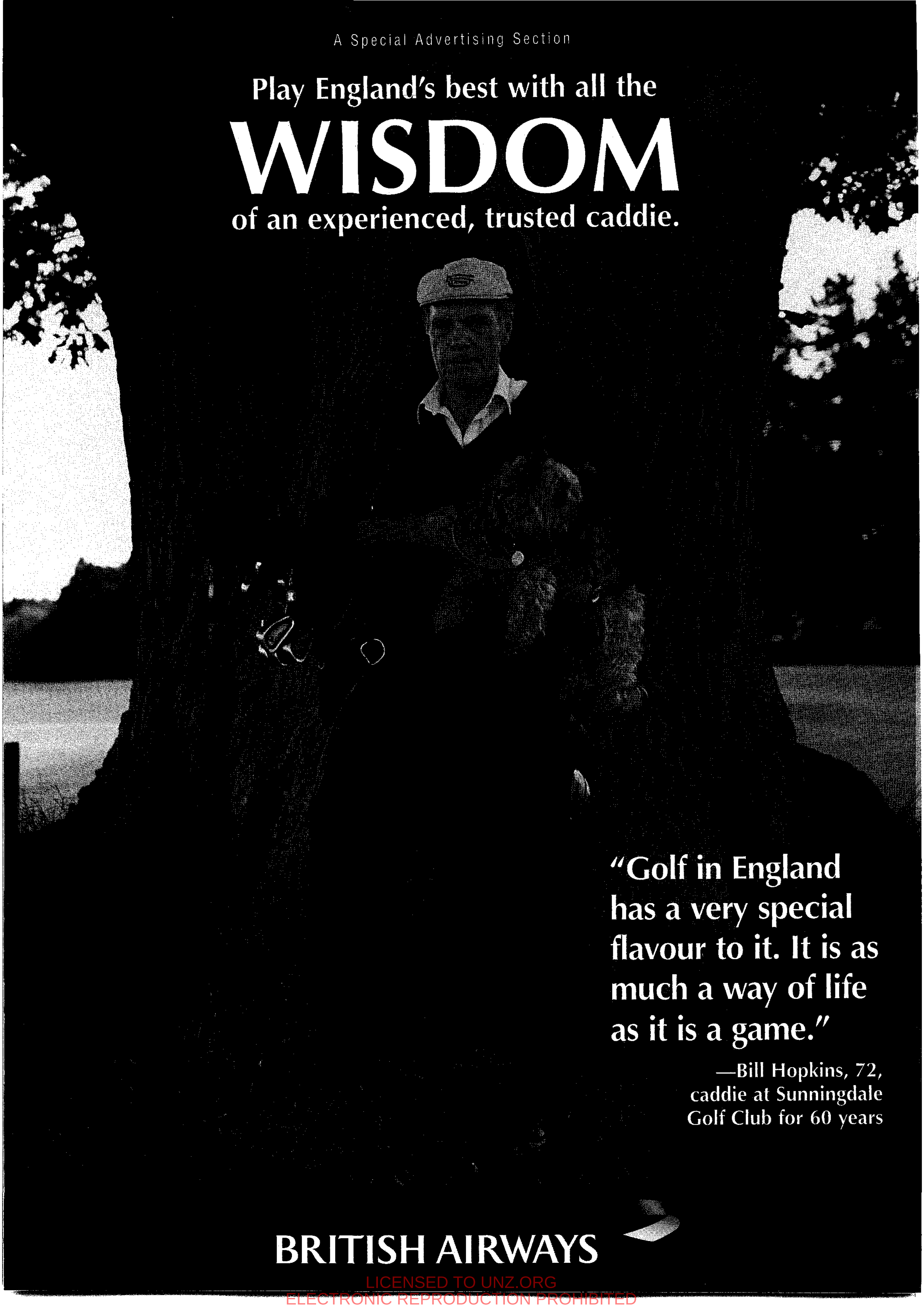
THE DECALOGUE
Another dose of fun from Krzysztof Kieslowski: ten hours of cancer, abortion, incest, strangulation, and the thwarting of brotherly love, mostly set amid the rainy projects of an oppressed Polish town. This series was made for Polish television in 1988, when the nation was still under martial law, and comprises ten hour-long films, each devoted to one of the Ten Commandments. Given those factors, the whole endeavor could have collapsed into rusty political parable, but, though Kieslowski's subjects are often parodies of gloom, he picks his way through them with a gathering delicacy and a frowning ironic wit. Anyone who associates art films with monotonous meditation will be surprised to find these movies so packed with stuff; the director doesn't shy away from murder, car chases, or fine-boned blondes, or from the Hollywood hook of a mysterious letter that warns, "To be opened after my death . . ." Kieslowski spies shards of beauty in the rubble of crummy lives, and seems wholly at ease with the random possibility of miracles. New prints are being shown in five double bills. Thou shalt not miss. In Polish.—*Anthony Lane* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas; starting Aug. 16.)

FULL FRONTAL
Steven Soderbergh and the screenwriter Coleman Hough have attempted a neo-Godardian deconstruction of cinematic reality, but the movie turns deconstruction into hash. Actors play actors who are making a movie within the movie, but half the time we can't tell whether we're in the inner or outer movie or why we should care. There are a few intense moments in which Julia Roberts, playing a magazine reporter, flirts with Blair Underwood, who plays a handsome black TV actor hoping to get his big break, but the scenes don't go anywhere. Neither does Catherine Keener's smoldering rage as a personnel director who, for some reason, throws a plastic globe at her company's employees and asks them to name the countries in Africa. The movie is the sort of whimsical and arbitrary mess that gives experimentation a bad name. With David Duchovny (very briefly), Mary McCormack, and David Hyde Pierce.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/5/02.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and 34th Street Theatre.)

THE GOOD GIRL
A comedy, darkly told, with a plot that never fails to attract: is there a way out of my narrow life? Jennifer Aniston puts on a Texas accent and plays Justine Last, a clerk at a faceless superstore, which seems to be the new epicenter of modern angst. Her co-workers include a sarcastic goth girl (Zooey Deschanel), a hyper-Christian security guard (Mike White), and a hunky, teen-age malcontent (Jake Gyllenhaal) who oh-so-subtly calls himself Holden. Soon, Justine and Holden are discovering the pleasures of the stockroom together. The movie is well acted and very funny about delusions, especially the writerly kind. It also complicates our loyalties by making Justine's husband (John C. Reilly) a decent, likable guy, even if he does smoke too much pot. Everything seems poised for a great finale, with the melancholic afterglow of a good Raymond Carver story. But the movie loses its tone—tragic moments, including a suicide, get treated in a flimsy way, and camp triumphs over content. The soundtrack, headlined by the Velvet Underground's "Sweet Jane," is a pleasure. Directed by Miguel Arteta, and written by Mike White.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center and 62nd & Broadway.)

I'M GOING HOME
At the age of ninety-two, Manoel de Oliveira has directed a wonderful, spare rumination on death. His alter ego, Michel Piccoli, plays a French theatre actor, who, after delivering the final speech of the dying monarch in Ionesco's "Exit the King," learns that his wife, daughter, and son-in-law have been killed in a car accident. In an oblique yet effective way, Oliveira doesn't show us Piccoli's reaction, but rather the fretful cluster of his fellow-actors. This is a film of long glances, where the moments are held for extra beats, as though the director is reminding us to look. He's also carefully documenting the quotidian joys of the café table and a new pair of shoes. Piccoli's performance is a multifaceted portrayal of dignity—in the morning, in the evening, and at the wrong end of a mugging. The sterling supporting cast includes Catherine Deneuve, Sylvie Testud, and John Malkovich as an American film director who whispers "cut" as though it's a curse. In French and English.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

THE KID STAYS IN THE PICTURE
Before Robert Evans was discovered at a Hollywood swimming pool by the aging Norma Shearer, he was a garmento from New York with swarthy good looks and the confidence of a lion. Thrust into pictures in his twenties, Evans quickly became the head of production at Paramount, where he played a significant role in generating such classics as "Rosemary's Baby," "The Godfather," and "Chinatown." The movie is a celebratory narrative of his life, composed of newsreel footage, stills, and haunting shots of Evans's mansion in various states of glory and disrepair. Evans himself narrates in his gravelly voice: his speech is a cross between hard-boiled rhetoric and the traditional crass-but-with-heart bullying of Hollywood power types. He comes off as a preposterously likable man, though the movie is so one-sided that you never get the truth of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—Bill Hopkins, 72, caddie at Sunningdale Golf Club for 60 years
BRITISH AIRWAYS

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THE ESSENCE OF THE GAME

English weather separates the real golfers from the imposters. There is something mildly heroic about playing golf in a wind strong enough to blow the freckles off your face. You arrive at the clubhouse thoroughly knackered, face as red as a strawberry and sometimes soaked to the bone . . . yet you feel strangely invigorated.

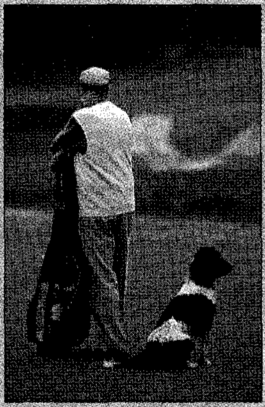
That healthy glow could also be the result of walking. As a rule, Englishmen like to tour the course under their own power. Instead of golf buggies, they march up and down the fairways with pull carts or they carry their own bags.

English golfers play faster than most Americans, too. While not quite as zealous as the Scots, who race around a course as if they have a train to catch, the English still reckon a threeball should take no more than three-and-a-half hours to play 18. By all means, stop to smell the flowers. Just don't dillydally along the way.

And it isn't a bad idea to bring plenty of balls. English heather and scrubgrass are delightfully pleasing to the eye, but they can bankrupt a high-handicapper. Balls cost substantially less in the States.

WISE & WEATHERED ADVICE

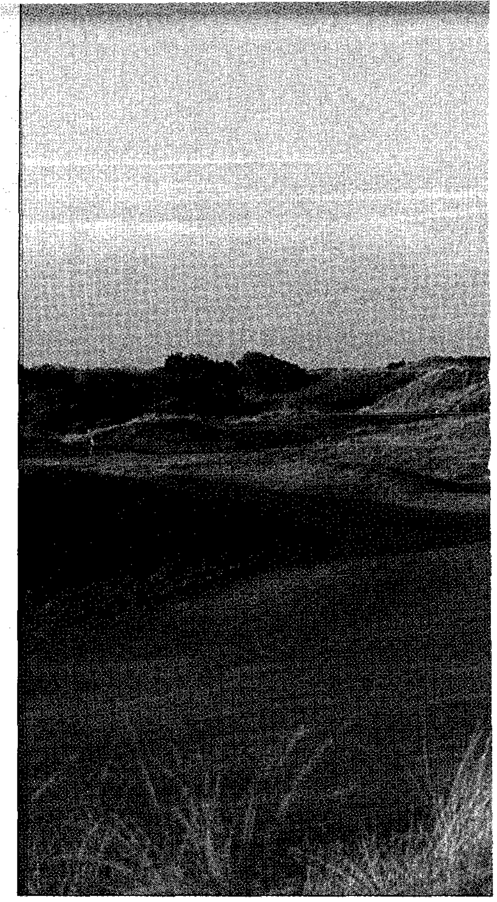
Bill Hopkins, 72, has been a caddie at Sunningdale Golf Club in Berkshire, England, for 60 years. His father also caddied at the club. "I can't think of anything I would have rather done with my life," he says. "When I was a wee 'un of 12 years old, I had to carry sand and put it down for my golfer, like a tee. And during World War II, I watched bombs land on or near the course."

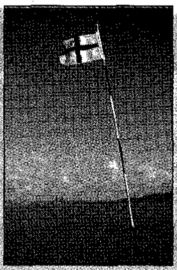


Hopkins still carries bags twice a week. Never far away is his Yorkshire Terrier, Timmy, who won't go anywhere without a Frisbee around his neck for a run-and-fetch at the halfway house. "Golf in Britain is all I've known all my life, so I don't have much to compare it with," Hopkins says. "But it seems to have a very special flavour to it. It is as much a way of life as it is a game."

Hopkins recommends that you enlist the aid of a local caddie whenever possible. You will probably pay him $40 to $70, but his advice on playing the wind and terrain will be worth every penny. Unfortunately, caddies can be rare at small clubs, so be prepared to go it alone. Enjoy the experience. Explore the sights and sounds of the countryside and there is little chance you will go home an unhappy golfer.

Heather and scrubgrass, though, are best admired from a healthy distance. "First-timers in England should not be too ambitious when hitting out of either," Hopkins says. "It's pretty sticky stuff. You should never take less than an 8-iron to get out of it."





BATTLING A BREEZE

Brian Bellinger, caddiemaster at The Wisley in Woking, England, tells newcomers to British golf to "think about the different ways of getting the ball to the hole. Through the air is one method, but often along the ground will be better, especially when the wind is blowing and the ground is hard and bouncy."

Here are a few more tips for smart play in the wind:

- On drives, tee the ball normally when hitting into the wind; higher when going downwind.
- Use a less-lofted club, play the ball back in your stance and punch the shot to keep it low, out of the wind.
- Think of tough par 4s as par 5s. A one-putt 4 should feel like a birdie.
- Allow for a crosswind. Don't try to fight it.
- If your trouser legs flap as you putt, the wind may affect the ball's line.
- Laugh in the face of the elements. Adopt a positive attitude to every adversity!

TRAVEL WITH BRITISH AIRWAYS & PLAY ENGLAND'S BEST

This September, the 34th Ryder Cup Matches will focus attention on golf's rich history in England. Despite the country's small size, its variety of golf venues—from seaside links to inland heathland courses—is enough to make anyone shout, "Good show!"

The best news: You can play almost all of them. Simply write a letter to the Secretary of the club well in advance of your trip, showing that you have an affiliation with a U.S. golf club and an established handicap.

Nine English courses have hosted Ryder Cup Matches and four have served as venues for British Open Championships. The De Vere Belfry, just outside Birmingham, England, and the site of this year's Ryder Cup play, was a potato field only 40 years ago. It now ranks as one of the world's best inland courses.

For golf with a greater historical flavour, visit Royal Birkdale (northwest of Manchester) and Royal St. George's (southeast of Canterbury). They're among the finest seaside links layouts anywhere on the planet. And just 30 minutes from London, magnificent Wentworth and Sunningdale provide visitors with elegant tree-lined golf.

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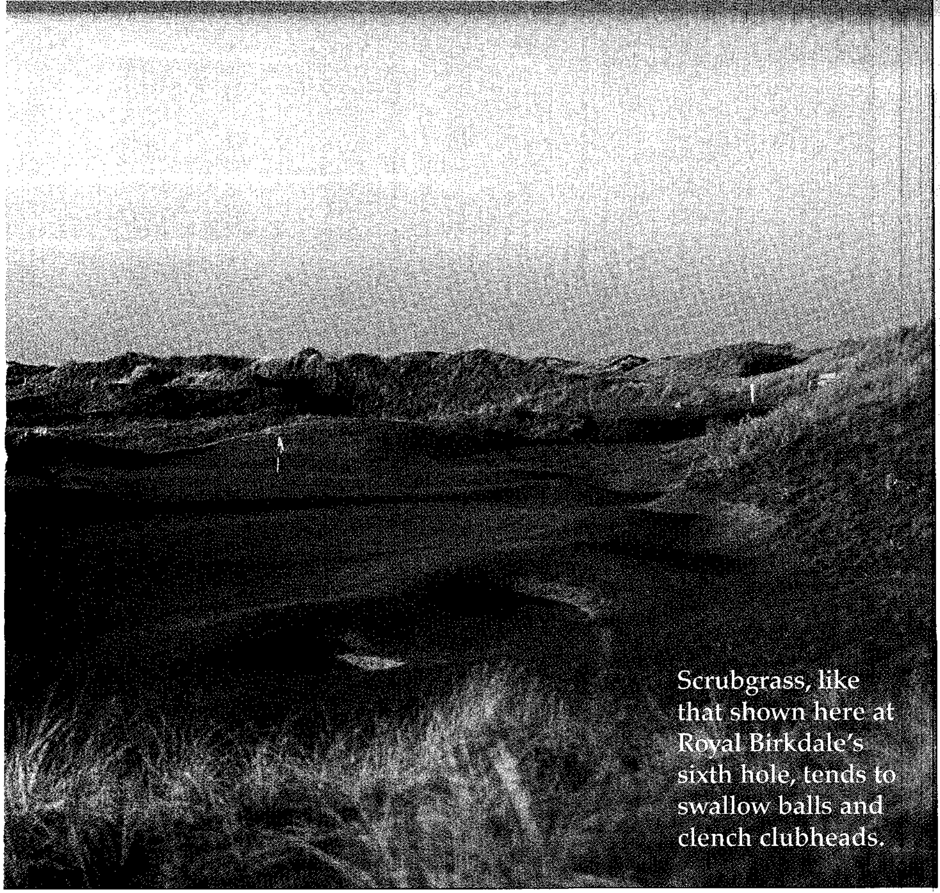

Scrubgrass, like that shown here at Royal Birkdale's sixth hole, tends to swallow balls and clench clubheads.

HOW TO BLEND WITH LOCALS ON AN ENGLISH COURSE

1 *Don't ask for the "bag drop."* It is as rare as haggis in America.

2 *Learn to stand in line.* In the eyes of an Englishman, a "queue" is a necessity of civilisation.

3 *Don't warm up hitting a few balls.* The traditional practice ground for the Englishman is the bar, where he has a very large brandy.

4 *Speak with sotto voce.* Golf is an experience to be savored in England. Listen to nature.

5 *Restrain your language.* When you duff a shot, say "rats" and "blast." When your partner duffs a shot, say something cheery like, "My dear old boy, what frightfully bad luck!"

6 *Avoid all talk of politics.* An Englishman tends to be deeply cynical about politicians, particularly those from across "the pond."

7 *Get a proper night's rest.* When you fly British Airways Club World, with the world's first fully flat bed in business class, you'll arrive ready to play.

TALKING THE TALK

Ask any Englishman what the "slope" of his course is and he will most likely look at you with a somewhat quizzical expression. Ask him again and he may say, "Yes, my dear fellow, we do have slopes. Quite a few actually."

That's because courses are not rated for difficulty in England. Our country is simply a green and pleasant land where sand traps are called "bunkers," a putt within gimme range is said to be "in the leather," and a pull cart is known as a "trolley."

PUB PROTOCOL

A round of golf in England is merely a preamble to exchanging stories and more than a few light-hearted barbs over drinks and a dart game. At the bigger clubs, jackets and ties are often required. Small pubs offer a more relaxed atmosphere. There is no finer feeling than sinking into a leather armchair, gazing dreamily through the smoke of your pipe, as you relive your best shots of the day.

Remember, the beer comes in pints and is meant to be warm. If you like American beer, ask quietly for a pint of lager.

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any situation that it touches on.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE LAST KISS

A superb, full-bodied Italian comedy written and directed by Gabriele Muccino. The movie is set in Rome, though it could take place in any large Italian city in which hip, good-looking young people work in a desultory way, cadge off their parents, go to weddings, hang out, and have sex a lot. As the characters long for more love and more freedom, the action is driven forward by a gliding camera that catches everyone in frenetic movement. The actors display prodigious gifts of temperament—that blessed absence of self-consciousness that links Italian opera to Italian comedy and makes so much French, English, and American work seem guarded or skittish by comparison. Muccino has a particular gift for lovers' quarrels, which he lets bloom into hilarious excess. In Italian.—*D.D.* (8/5/02) (Sunshine Cinema.)

POSSESSION

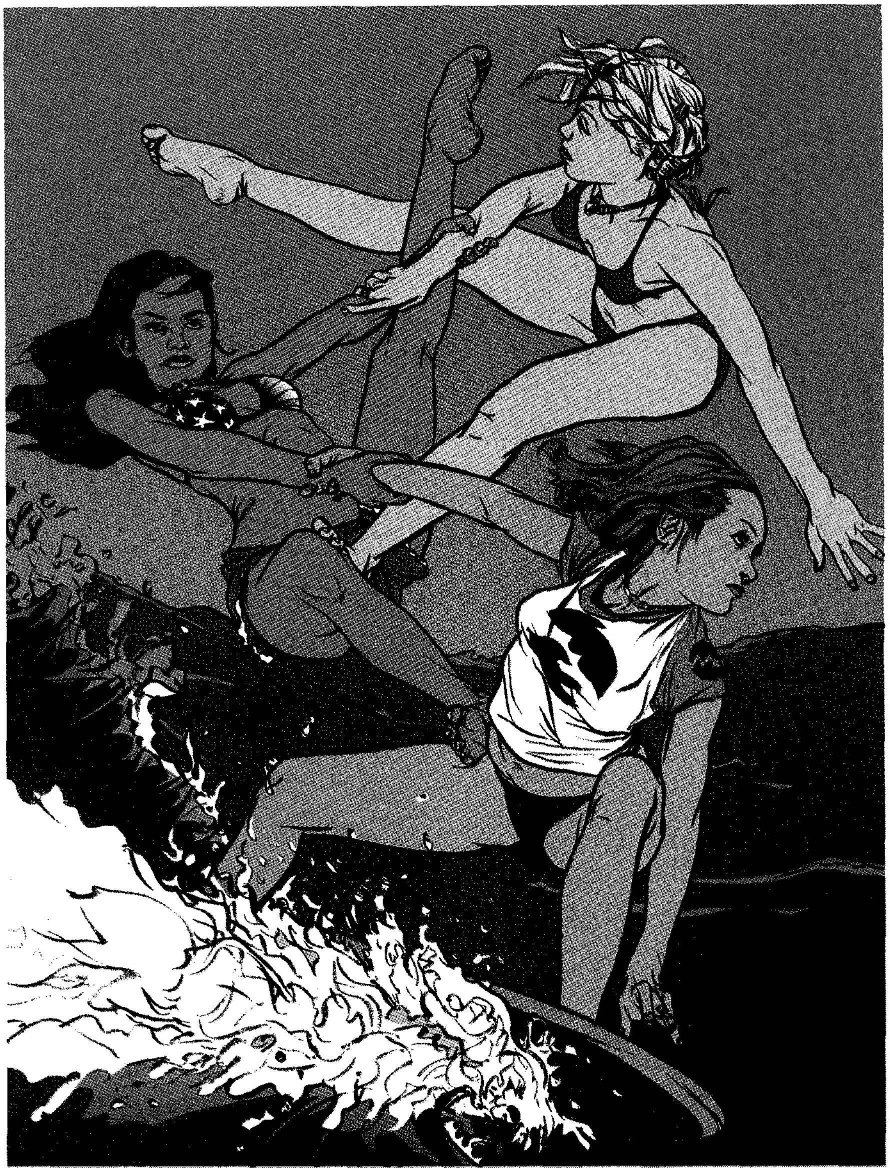
Neil LaBute's adaptation of A. S. Byatt's novel is disappointingly tepid. Two contemporary literary scholars, a coldly composed British professor (Gwyneth Paltrow) and a scruffy American graduate student (Aaron Eckhart) discover a cache of secret letters exchanged by the great (fictional) Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash (Jeremy Northam) and an intriguing (fictional) minor poet, Christabel LaMotte (Jennifer Ehle). As the scholars track down evidence of a passionate, illicit love affair between the two poets, they experience their own, neurotic version of love, and LaBute cuts back and forth between past and present. The period re-creation is faultless, and the narrative technique very smooth, but the movie never works up much fire. Eckhart gives his best movie performance yet, but you know a film is in trouble when it seems like a frigid version of "The French Lieutenant's Woman."—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

RED BEARD

In the West, this 1965 film, the last of Akira Kurosawa's collaborations with Toshiro Mifune, is derided as a soap opera. But this story of a grizzled nineteenth-century doctor nicknamed Red Beard (Mifune) and the green physician (Yuzo Kayama) who learns humane medical values from him is actually a masterpiece. Kurosawa somehow manages to imbue every moment of this three-hour-plus movie with the transcendent vitality and intelligence of a great Victorian novel. Mifune wisely plays a selfless hero with fierce brusqueness. He leads Kayama's headstrong, sensitive neophyte toward an understanding of healing as a social process, not merely as a doling-out of diagnoses and prescriptions. In Kurosawa's dynamic yet intimate wide-screen filmmaking, practicality and empathy merge with psychoanalysis and even bits of magic; the young doctor's near-fatal close encounter with a female serial killer, and a virtuous man's deathbed confession of a horrifying marital tragedy, are among the sequences building to a genuinely inspirational conclusion. In Japanese.—*M.S.* (Film Forum; Aug. 25-26.)

ROAD TO PERDITION

A solemnly beautiful art concept—which is not quite the same thing as a great movie. The talented English director Sam Mendes ("American Beauty"), along with his collaborators, the cinematographer Conrad L. Hall and the veteran costume designer Albert Wolsky, draw their visual ideas and moods from old movies and comic books, distilling the memory of crime fiction—rather than the memory of crime—into imagery that could not be more iconic. Tom Hanks plays a Depression-era mob assassin, a family man with a small moustache and a stiff walk. He moves through a stylized world of fedoras, long dark coats, and thick-woven suits; there's also lots of rain coming straight down the way it did in noir movies of the forties and fifties. Visually, the picture is all of a piece, but it's a self-conscious work—all dark-toned academic classicism.—*D.D.* (7/15/02) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)



NATHAN FOX

Michelle Rodriguez, Sanoe Lake, and Kate Bosworth in "Blue Crush."

SECRET BALLOT

The Iranian director Babak Payami's gentle road movie about a lonely soldier (Cyrus Abidi) and a female election official (Nassim Abdi) whom he's ordered to escort while she collects ballots, has the offbeat, intimate texture of a well-worn traveller's tale. As they canvas the small Iranian island of Kish, meeting its somewhat eccentric citizens, they challenge each other's beliefs—political and social—with the playful absurdity of an opposites-attract comedy. The film succeeds in delivering its message of tolerance and patience without resorting to long-winded speeches—it glides on its humorous charm. In Farsi.—*B.D.* (Quad Cinema.)

SIGNS

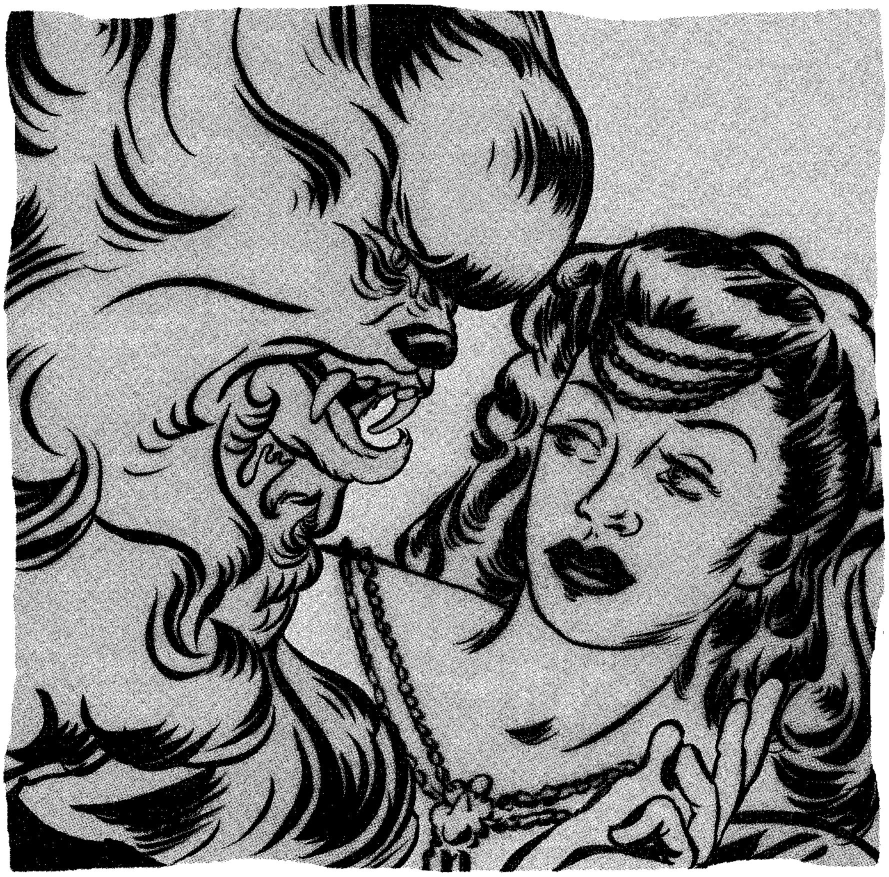
A third attempt, on the part of M. Night Shyamalan, to disturb our sleep. This time we are in rural Pennsylvania, home to Graham Hess (Mel Gibson), who used to be a minister and is now a farmer; the story is designed to make him wonder if that was such a smart move. First come the crop circles, then glimpses of green men—none too little, by the look of them—vanishing into the corn. Hess is skeptical, but his brother (Joaquin Phoenix) and children (Abigail Breslin and Rory Culkin) are more seriously spooked, and with good cause; soon enough, it becomes clear that aliens have landed all over the world in search of human beings and other comforting snacks. Shyamalan takes it easy on the special effects; much of the movie, which skirts dangerously close to the uneventful in its need to draw out the suspense, consists merely of the family sitting around watching TV or waiting for a claw under the door. The ending is far too freighted with spiritual intent, yet, as with "The Sixth Sense," you can neither ignore nor forget the mist of sickly unease, streaked with black humor, that rises out of the plot. If Shyamalan is aiming to earn his professional doom-monger's license, he's going about it the right way. With Cherry Jones as a cop.—*A.L.* (8/12/02) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

TADPOLE

A short but annoying film from Gary Winick, who brings us the astonishing news that teen-age boys want to make out with women three times their age. Oscar (Aaron Stanford) is fifteen, half-French, and wholly unappealing; nevertheless, he goes to bed with a chiropractor (Bebe Neuwirth) and hungers after his own stepmother (Sigourney Weaver), who vaguely returns the compliment. Some of the scenes, involving Oscar the hapless patsy rather than Oscar the hopeful swain, are smartly managed; others, like an overcooked sequence at Café Boulud, prove harder to stomach. The movie was shot on digital video, which means that most viewers will reach for their spectacles before realizing that the fuzz is not their fault. Only

Bebe Neuwirth fans, a discerning crowd, will have a ball. She has never been so mean or, as a result, so hot to the touch.—*A.L.* (7/29/02) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

24 HOUR PARTY PEOPLE
Tony Wilson, the Manchester music impresario who founded Factory records in the late seventies—home to Joy Division (later New Order) and the Happy Mondays, among others—gets a fevered tribute in Michael Winterbottom's blast of a film. Wilson is played with a brilliant élan by British comic Steve Coogan—a standout performance that captures the dour enthusiasm of Wilson's genius. And Winterbottom's casting of the myriad musician roles is flawless; there isn't a hair style or a body type that seems out of place. The film's direction has the jittery anarchic feel of a good punk song, and the script displays a fast and free humor that indulges in the excesses of a rock-and-roll life.—*B.D.* (Sunshine Cinema.)



At Film Forum, Jean Cocteau's "Beauty and the Beast."

XXX
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE FAST RUNNER (ATANARJUAT)
Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.

K-19: THE WIDOWMAKER (7/29/02)
Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

LOVELY & AMAZING
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, and Empire 25.

MINORITY REPORT (7/1/02)
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Union Square.

READ MY LIPS (7/15/02)
Paris.

STUART LITTLE 2
Battery Park 16, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.

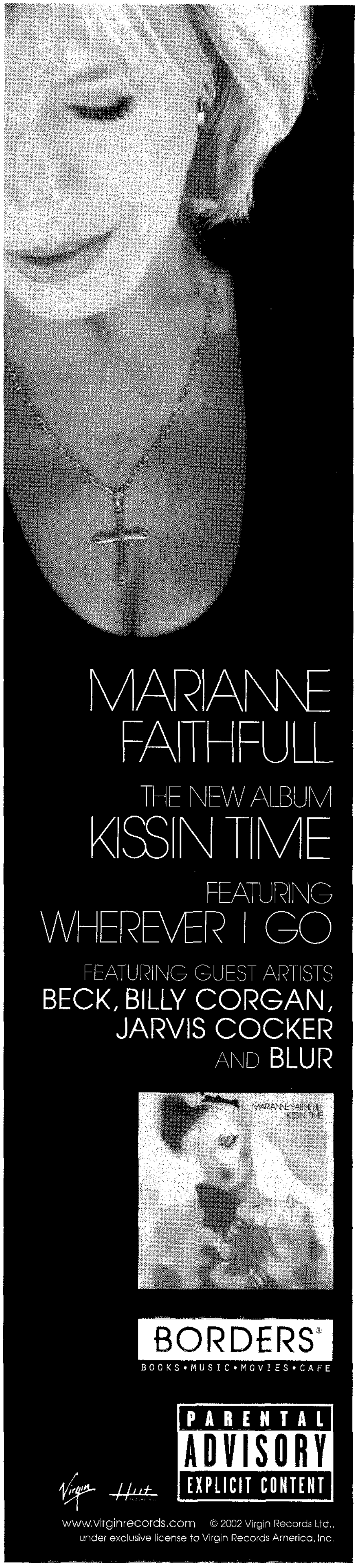
SUNSHINE STATE (7/8/02)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.

ZOHAR LAZAR



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Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 8: "Carnal Knowledge: The Sexual Revolution on Film, 1967-1972." Aug. 17 at 2: "Fellini Satyricon" (1969, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4:30: "The Decameron" (1970, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 18 at 2: "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" (1971, Melvin Van Peebles). ♦ Aug. 18 at 4: "W. R.: Mysteries of the Organism" (1971, Dusan Makavejev; in Serbian). ♦ Aug. 24 at 2: "Women in Love" (1969, Ken Russell). ♦ Aug. 24 at 4:30: "Sunday Bloody Sunday" (1971, John Schlesinger). ♦ Aug. 25 at 2: "The Lickerish Quartet" (1970, Radley Metzger). ♦ Aug. 25 at 4:30: "Carmen, Baby" (1967, Metzger). ♦ Repertory nights. Aug. 17-18 at 6:30: "Claire's Knee" (1971, Eric Rohmer; in French). ♦ Aug. 24-25 at 6:30: "Small Change" (1976, François Truffaut; in French).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Aug. 15-22: "The Happiness of the Katakuris" (2001, Takashi Miike; in Japanese). ♦ Aug. 16-23: The 2002 New York Korean Film Festival. Visit www.koreanfilmforum.org for a complete schedule. ♦ Aug. 23 at 7 and 10: "The Cabinet of Dr. Ramirez" (1990, Peter Sellars). ♦ Masters of the American Music Film Festival. Aug. 24 at 2:30: "Celebrating Bird—The Triumph of Charlie Parker" (1987, Gary Giddins and Kendrick Simmons) and "The World According to John Coltrane" (1991, Robert Palmer and Toby Byron). ♦ Aug. 24 at 5: "Satchmo" (1989, Giddins and Simmons). ♦ Aug. 24 at 7: "Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday" (1990, Matthew Seig) and "Count Basie: Swingin' the Blues" (1993, Seig). ♦ Aug. 24 at 9:30: "Sarah Vaughan—The Divine One" (1987, Seig) and "Ray Charles: The Genius of Soul" (1992, Yvonne Smith). ♦ Aug. 25 at 2: "Alberta Hunter, My Castle's Rockin'" (1992, Stuart Goldman) and "No Maps on My Taps" (1979, George T. Nierenberg). ♦ Aug. 25 at 4:30: "Thelonious Monk: American Composer" (1991, Seig) and "That Rhythm, Those Blues" (1988, Nierenberg). ♦ Aug. 25 at 7: "The Story of Jazz" (1993, Seig). ♦ Aug. 25 at 9:15: "Bluesland: A Portrait in American Music" (1993, Ken Mandel).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Aug. 14 at 4:30 and 6:50: "The Collector" (1969, William Wyler). ♦ The films of Ken Loach. Aug. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "My Name Is Joe" (1998). ♦ Aug. 16 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Ladybird Ladybird" (1994). ♦ Aug. 17-18 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Land and Freedom" (1995). ♦ The American cinema of Fritz Lang. Aug. 19 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Hangmen Also Die" (1943). ♦ Aug. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Ministry of Fear" (1944). ♦ Aug. 26-27 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Scarlet Street" (1945). ♦ "In Memoriam: Billy Wilder." Aug. 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Sunset Boulevard" (1950). ♦ Aug. 23-25: New Korean cinema. See www.koreanfilmforum.org for a complete schedule.

BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. (512-5700)—Free outdoor movies, starting at dusk. Aug. 19: "Bye Bye Birdie" (1963, George Sidney).

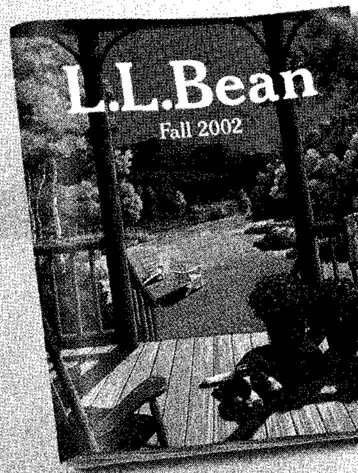
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Sept. 12: "Kurosawa & Mifune," a retrospective of the director-actor team. All films are in Japanese. Aug. 14-15 at 1, 4, and 8: "The Bad Sleep Well" (1960). ♦ Aug. 16-20 at 1:20, 4, 6:40, and 9:20: "The Hidden Fortress" (1958). ♦ Aug. 21-24 at 1:20, 3:30, 5:40, 7:50, and 10: "Yojimbo" (1961). ♦ Aug. 25-26 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "Red Beard" (†). ♦ Aug. 27 at 1:10, 3:10, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Sanjuro" (1962).

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
Broadway at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-956-1819)—Free outdoor movies, starting at dusk. Aug. 14: "Chunhyang" (2000, Im Kwon Taek; in Korean). ♦ Aug. 21: "Guantanamera" (1997, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea; in Spanish).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (358-0573)—Midnight movies. Aug. 16-17: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Aug. 23-24: "The Big Lebowski" (1998, Joel Coen).

THALIA THEATRE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Sept. 8: "Classic Thalia: A Tribute to Martin and Ursula Lewis." Aug. 14 at 7: "The Searchers" (1956, John Ford). ♦ Aug. 14 at 9:15: "Red River" (1948, Howard Hawks). ♦ Aug. 15 at 7: "Valley of Abraham" (1993, Manoel de Oliveira; in Portuguese). ♦ Aug. 16 at 7: "Psycho" (1960, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Aug. 16 at 9:15: "Silence of the Lambs" (1990, Jonathan Demme). ♦ Aug. 17 at 3 and 7:30: "Irma Vep" (1997, Olivier Assayas; in French). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4:45 and 9:15: "Day for Night" (1973, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ Aug. 18 at 1 and 7: "Blue" (1993, Krzysztof Kieslowski; in French). ♦ Aug. 18 at 2:45 and 8:45: "White" (1993, Kieslowski; in French and Polish). ♦ Aug. 18 at 4:30 and 10:30: "Red" (1994, Kieslowski; in French). ♦ Aug. 20 at 7: "What Happened to Kerouac?" (1985, Richard Lerner). ♦ Aug. 20 at 8:45: "New York in the Fifties" (2001, Betsy Blankenbaker). ♦ Aug. 21 at 7: "Red Firecracker, Green Firecracker" (1993, He Ping; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 21 at 9:15: "Farewell My Concubine" (1993, Chen Kaige; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 22 at 7: "Central Station" (1998, Walter Salles; in Portuguese). ♦ Aug. 22 at 9: "Landscape in the Mist" (1988, Theo Angelopoulos; in Greek). ♦ Aug. 23 at 7: "The Wrong Move" (1974, Wim Wenders; in German). ♦ Aug. 23 at 9: "Wings of Desire" (1988, Wenders; in German). ♦ Aug. 24 at 3, 6, and 9: Animated shorts by Jan Svankmajer. ♦ Aug. 25 at 1, 4:45, and 8:30: "Apocalypse Now Redux" (2001, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ Aug. 27 at 7: "Jazz on a Summer's Day" (1960, Bert Stern).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Aug. 15: "Happy Birthday, Kino." Aug. 14 at 1 and 6:15: "Daughters of the Dust" (1991, Julie Dash). ♦ Aug. 14 at 3:15: "The Blue Kite" (1993, Tian Zhuangzhuang; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 14 at 8:30: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1954, Robert Bresson; in French). ♦ Aug. 15 at 1: "Capitaine Conan" (1996, Bertrand Tavernier; in French). ♦ Aug. 15 at 3:45 and 9: "The Blue Angel" (1930, Josef Von Sternberg; in German). ♦ Aug. 16-22: "Modern Musicals." Aug. 16 at 1, 4:30, and 8:15; Aug. 18 at 7:15; and Aug. 20 at 1:30: "I'll Sing for You" (2001, Jacques Sarasin; in French). ♦ Aug. 16 at 2:40, 6:15, and 10 and Aug. 17 at 1 and 7:15: "Super 8 Stories" (2001, Emir Kusturica; in Serbo-Croatian). ♦ Aug. 17 at 3 and Aug. 19 at 1, 5, and 9: "Latcho Drom" (1994, Tony Gatlif; in French). ♦ Aug. 17 at 5:15 and 9:15 and Aug. 19 at 3:10 and 7:10: "Scratch" (2001, Doug Pray). ♦ Aug. 18 at 1 and 5:15 and Aug. 21 at 1, 4:50, and 8:45: "100% Arabica" (1997, Mahmoud Zemmouri; in French). ♦ Aug. 18 at 3 and 9, Aug. 20 at 3:15, and Aug. 22 at 3 and 7:10: "Calle 54" (†). ♦ Aug. 21 at 2:45 and 6:45 and Aug. 22 at 1, 5:10, and 9:15: "Radiohead: Meeting People Is Easy" (1999, Grant Gee). ♦ Two rediscoveries: a Kazakh epic about Genghis Khan and a Bollywood classic. Aug. 23 at 1 and 8, Aug. 24 at 4:30, Aug. 25 at 1 and 8, Aug. 26 at 4:30, and Aug. 27 at 1 and 8: "The Fall of Otrar" (1990, Ardak Amirkulov; in Kazakh, Mandarin, and Mongolian). ♦ Aug. 23 at 4:30, Aug. 24 at 1 and 8, Aug. 25 at 4:30, Aug. 26 at 1 and 8, and Aug. 27 at 4:30: "Mother India" (1957, Mehboob Khan; in Hindi).



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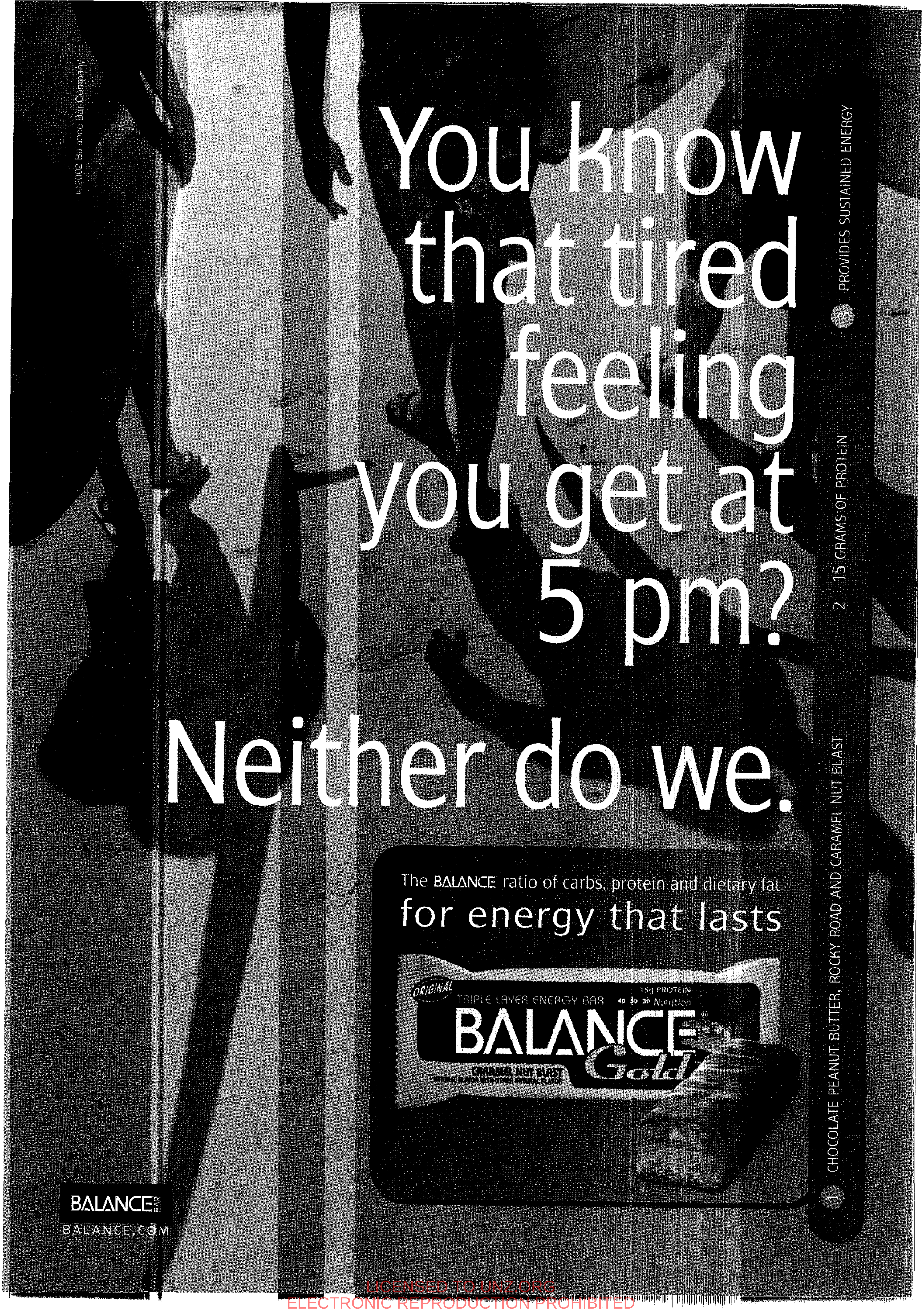
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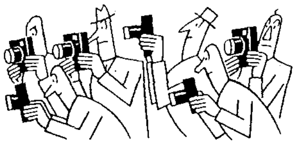
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

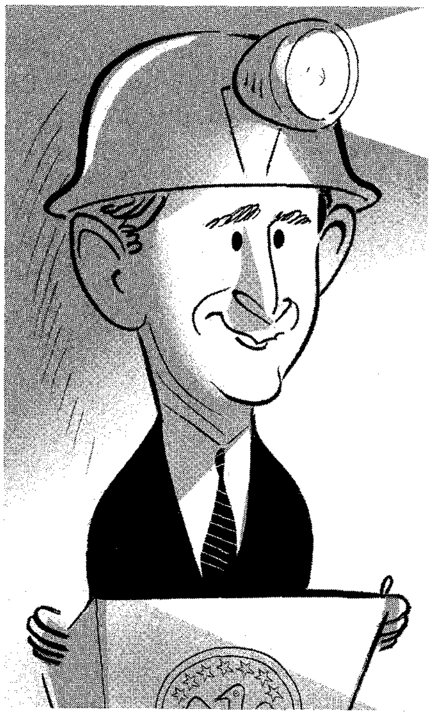
COMMENT
MINE SHAFT



In a season of dolor—when the news is mostly of economic ruin, climatic foreboding, the abduction of children, and, of course, terrorism, war, and rumors of war—the rescue of the Quecreek Nine was an interlude of gladness. Nine coal miners trapped deep beneath a cow pasture in southwestern Pennsylvania, the equivalent of twenty-four stories straight down; the miners scratching and crawling their way through pitch-black, four-foot-high tunnels fast filling with icy floodwater to find one another and a pocket of stale air; the rescue team aboveground, improvising a plan to pump in compressed air to push the water back, snapping a drill bit, almost losing hope; the miners, preparing for imminent death, sealing notes to their loved ones in a watertight bucket; time and air running out; and then, finally, as midnight approached on the fourth night, a breakthrough, joy and weeping, the miners lifted out one by one, all nine of them, haggard but whole.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC PALMA

It's a fine, uplifting story, full of terror and suspense, grit and determination—a story that shows, as did the story of September 11th and its aftermath, that a working-class hero is something to be. And this story has what that one did not: a happy ending. So Hollywood said: We're *there*. A week after the rescue, the nine miners, plus one of the lead rescuers, inked a Tinseltown pact, as *Variety* might put it. Or, as *Variety* actually did put it: "The Walt Disney Co. has locked up a nearly $1.5 million deal for the exclusive book and TV movie rights to the personal stories of the nine Pennsylvania miners. . . . Mouse web ABC will produce a two-hour telepic about the rescue operation, while Disney publishing unit Hyperion is expected to release a book about their ordeal." That's a hundred and fifty grand per miner, before taxes and lawyers' fees—which is either a lot or a little, depending on what you compare it with.



If you compare it with what the miners (who, among them, had more than two hundred man-years on the job) were making before, it's a lot. Their yearly wages, which are about forty per cent higher than the county average, come to around forty thousand dollars each, counting overtime. So the Disney deal will yield them upward of three years' pay. On the other hand, if you compare it with what their employers get, it's a little. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported last week, the Quecreek mine, "although portrayed during the rescue efforts as a tiny operation, is closely linked to a web of companies controlled by the venture-capital arm of Citigroup Inc." In 2001, Sanford Weill, the chairman of Citigroup, collected eighteen million dollars in salary and bonuses, which means it took him around five hours to rack up what one of those miners made all year. What about the miners' new boss? According to the calculations of *Forbes* magazine, Michael Eisner, the C.E.O. of Disney, received seven hundred and twenty-three million dollars in salary, bonuses, and stock options from 1996 to 2001, a yearly average of roughly a hundred and forty-five million. That could pay the yearly wages of more than three thousand coal miners (and, thanks to mechanization, there are only seventy thousand in the whole country). To be fair, on an hourly basis Disney paid Eisner only thirty-five times what it's paying the miners for each of the seventy-seven hours they were trapped (though once you throw in the hours they'll have to spend talking to the film producers and book writers, it'll be more like a hundred times). Such is the magic of the market.

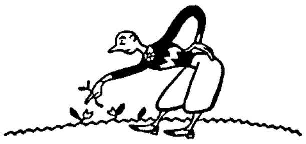
The Quecreek Nine, like a majority of coal miners and unlike the firefighters, cops, and hardhats of September 11th, are nonunion. But this is not necessarily a mark of their devotion to rugged individualism. The complicated ownership and contracting arrangements under which mines like Quecreek operate are designed largely to keep union organizers at bay. For coal operators, and in the private sector generally, it's just sound business practice to fire people who might be thinking of joining a union and then maybe pay a small fine for it a year or two later. (Public-employee unions do better at organizing, despite the fact that strikes in the public sector are generally illegal, because it's politically awkward for the government to flout the law.) If the Quecreek Nine had been members of the United Mine Workers of America, the legendary union that, in its glory days under John L. Lewis, had more than half a million members and made Presidents quake, their pay and benefits would have been a little sweeter, and they would have had a tough workplace-safety committee to represent them. Still, it's due mainly to the union's efforts that even nonunion wages are as high as they are. And the federal agency that helped supervise the rescue, the Mine Health and Safety Administration, was founded, in 1969, partly as a result of pressure from the U.M.W.A.

Nonunion though they were, the Quecreek miners conspicuously displayed the noblest of all trade-union virtues: solidarity. They prayed together; they shared the single sandwich that was their only food; they lashed themselves together so that in death their bodies would not be separated. Once rescued, they shared with all and sundry the cases of beer that a local distributor had given them. And when it came time to negotiate with the folks from Hollywood they did so as a group, instead of trying to cut individual and possibly more lucrative deals at one another's expense.

A week after the rescue, President Bush dropped in for a photo op with the miners and told them that "it was their determination to stick together and to comfort each other that really defines kind of a new spirit that's prevalent in our country—that when one of us suffers, all of us suffer; that in order to succeed, we've got to be united; that by working together, we can achieve big objectives and big goals." A beautiful sentiment. But, although the Bush energy policy calls for the extraction and burning of more and more coal, the Bush budget calls for a six-per-cent cut in funding for the Mine Safety and Health Administration. It's hard to say which of these moves is the more unwise. According to Senator Jay Rockefeller, of West Virginia, the budget cut will result in a twenty-five-per-cent decline in the mine agency's inspection workforce, whose job it is to prevent accidents like the one at Quecreek from taking place at all. The Quecreek Nine were saved; but last year forty-two miners were killed digging coal, as against twenty-nine in 1998. Solidarity forever. Just not at this point in time.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

PANGS
A PATCH OF EARTH

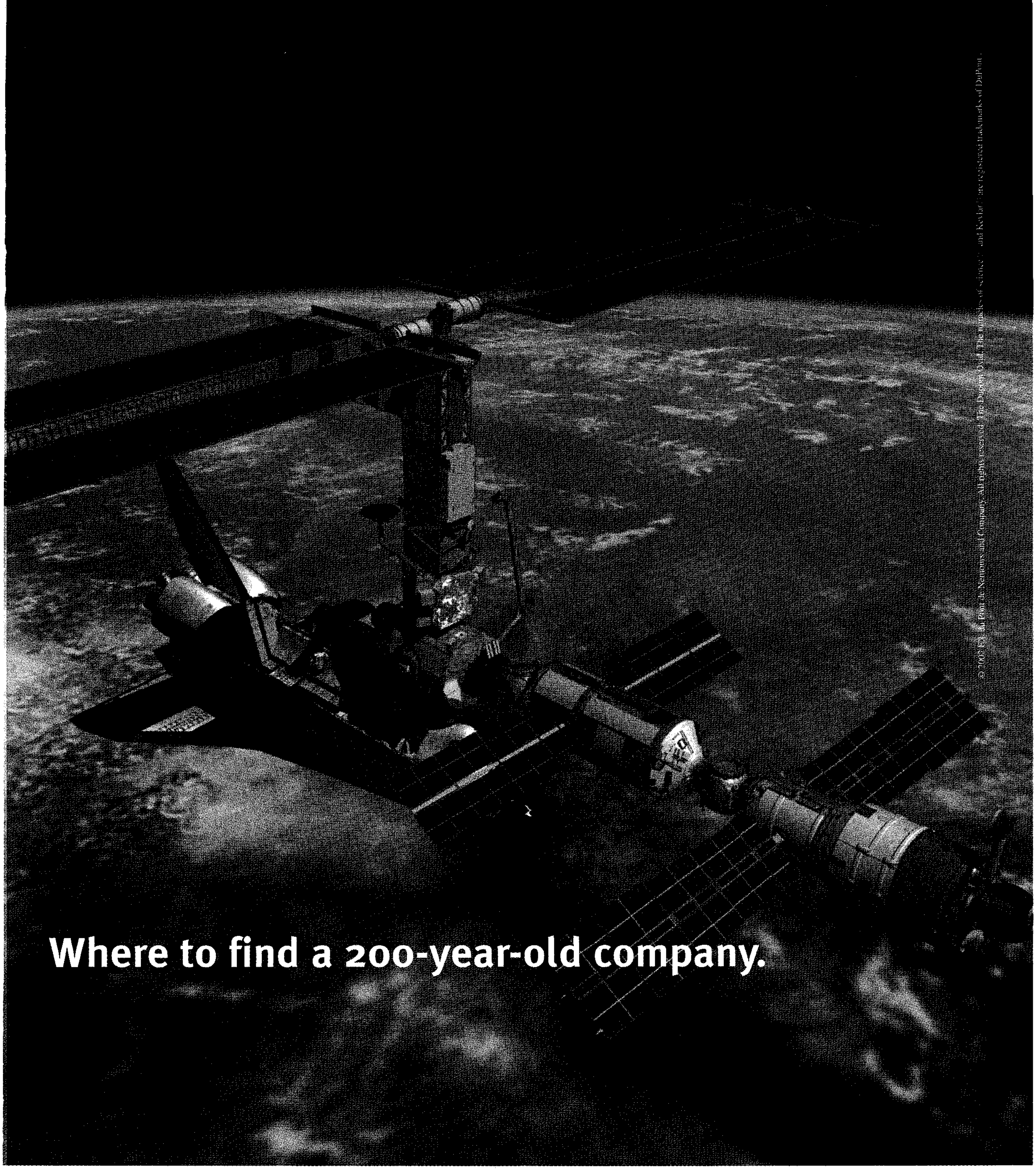


What does a New York lament look like? Green—at any rate, if you're Irish. Down by the unhealed scar of lower Manhattan, at the northern tip of Battery Park City, a brilliant, heavily irrigated field of clover, bog grass, rushes, and heather, strewn with rocks, mourns the one million dead, and the one and a half million uprooted, of the Irish potato famine of 1845-52. Despite the fact that the Hunger Memorial, at North End Avenue, tilts up sharply over the Hudson, no one seems to be able to find it. Nancy, an Irish New Yorker, had heard about it from Joan, who had heard about it at home in County Mayo, but both women had a devil of a time tracking it down last week, and complained that there were no signs anywhere indicating its whereabouts, and no one, least of all a cop, who had a clue about what or where it was.

We seem wired to grieve with greenery. Allowing the dead to dissolve into the earth, to become part of the cycle of the seasons, has, for millennia, held the promise of cheating mortality. Come spring, memory buds. Funeral barrows and mounds were among the first marks made by man on the northern European landscape, and Brian Tolle, the designer of the memorial, had the inspired idea of creating an urban tumulus—in this case, a cantilevered platform of verdure supported by a concrete base. Into this micro-landscape, planted with species native to Mayo (one of the hardest hit of the western counties) and strewn with fieldstones engraved with the names of all the counties of Ireland, is packed the memory of the calamity.

A walk up the hill becomes a journey from Old World ruin to New World redemption. At the bottom stands a ruined stone cottage, dismantled in Mayo and reassembled here, its end gables and hearthstone intact. It is roofless, a reminder of the evictions that followed the famine. At the brow of the hill is a rough-hewn standing stone, a cross cut into its face. From the retaining wall at the top, the view opens to the glittering river, the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island—and the cranes and towers of American commerce on the New Jersey bank. The experience of the place suddenly doubles in significance: both trauma and hope, departure and arrival, exile and rescue. Walking the memorial's perimeter, one becomes aware that what appears from the front to be a meadow turns out, when seen from the side, to be ship-shaped, the prow pointing toward the Hudson.

By having the landscape virtually enact the story, Tolle neatly sidestepped the figurative-abstract dilemma facing designers of historical memorials. Figurative monuments are habitually presented as the populist choice: statuary or groups that freeze an emblematic moment, even when, as at the Iwo Jima flag-raising, that moment was itself conceived with commemorative publicity in mind. For historians committed to the absolute inimitability of the past, these totems come painfully close to kitsch, three-dimensional boosters of the movie event. In Stirling, Scot-



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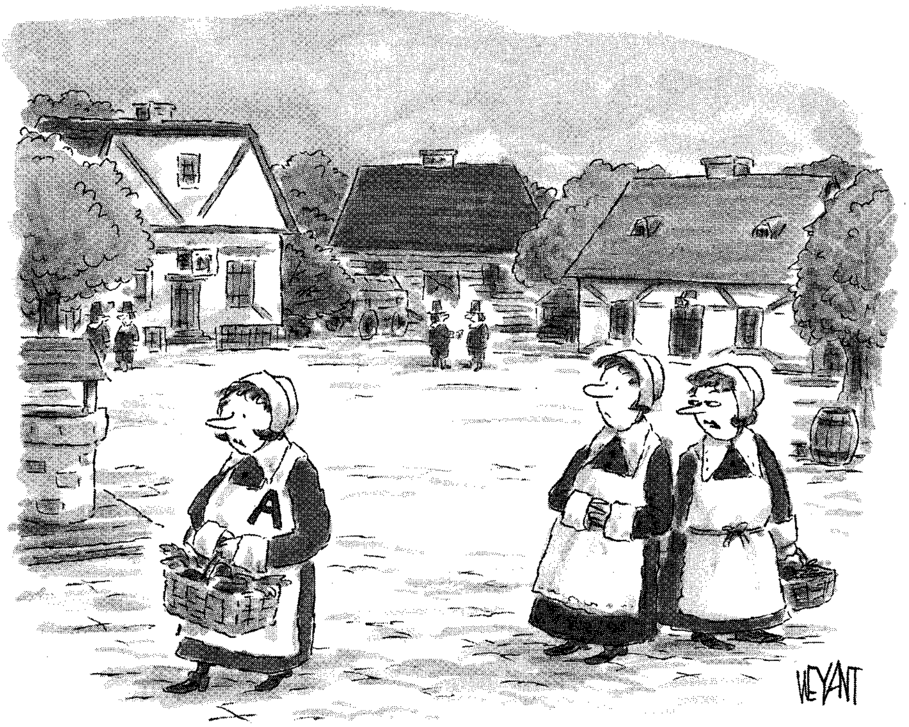

"Accountant."

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land, no one paid much attention to the statue of a whiskered William Wallace until the making of "Braveheart," at which point a second statue, at its base, of Mel Gibson dressed as the Hero, was celebrated by flocks of pilgrims as "more real." Abstract monuments, on the other hand, run the risk of philosophical remoteness from lived experience; their symbolic forms are too rarefied to trigger memories of dates, places, and people. Only occasionally, as with Ossip Zadkine's "Destroyed City," in Rotterdam, which commemorates the Luftwaffe bombing with a stylized figure whose upraised arms suggest both defenseless entreaty and ferocious defiance, can the two genres successfully marry.

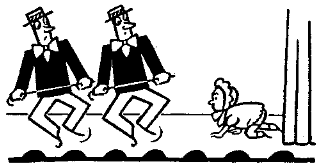
The Hunger Memorial makes these alternatives moot. Its tiny scale—a fragment of Ireland torn from the blighted whole—reminds the visitor of the unviable minuteness of the lots that, when the potatoes rotted, left millions destitute. But the grassy hill, a piece of the auld sod stripped of sentimentality but not of emotion, is also meant as a space for meditation: how could the greatest famine in nineteenth-century Europe have persisted in the back yard of the wealthiest empire in the world?

Anything resembling a linear narrative of the famine has been studiously avoided, to allow for a display of quotations, homilies, and data recitations, deliberately jumbled, so that George Pataki shares wall space with Tocqueville (nice for the Governor). Genuinely heartbreaking moments of witness are crowded out by social-studies pieties relating the number of Americans who are obese. Such pedagogy could not have been more wrongheaded, reducing history to screen-crawl captioning.

The most telling quotation is from Charles Trevelyan, the British Treasury official in charge of famine relief, who, as people ate wild cabbage and buried their babies, opined that the best thing for Ireland would be for the misfortune to teach the Irish "to depend upon themselves for developing the resources of their country, instead of having recourse to the assistance of government on every occasion." Government, in other words, was the problem, not the solution. One can emerge from this tunnel of obtuseness, gaze north and south at the canyons of capitalism, and marvel at the certainties of the rich.

—*Simon Schama*

THE BOARDS
HELLO MUDDAH, HELLO FADDAH

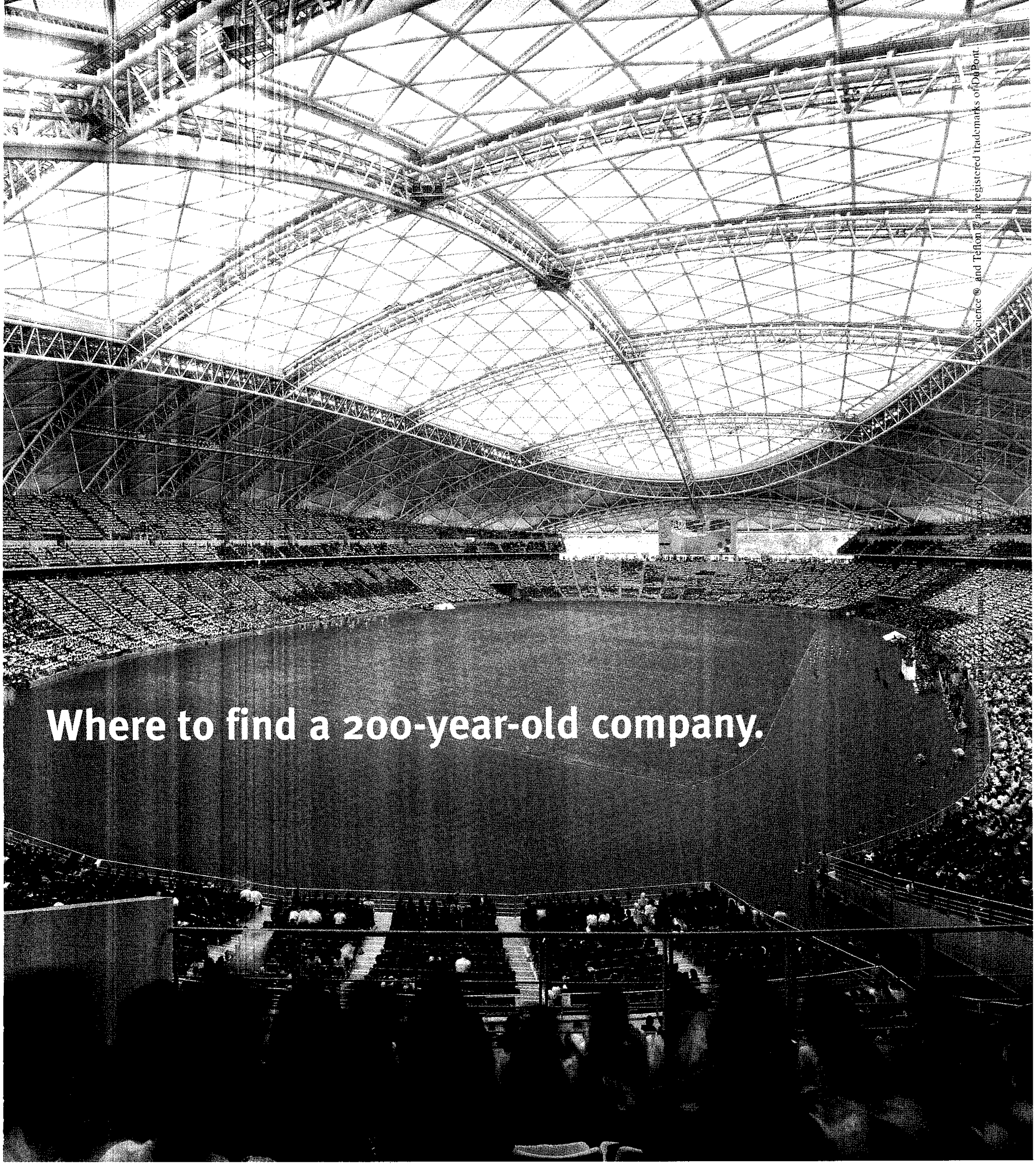


Box-office is down on Broadway, but the most cheerful and high-spirited theatrical producer in town last week was Camp Broadway, yielding three musicals—"Oklahoma!," "State Fair," and "On the Town"—plus a number of perks. The performers, rehearsing at Chelsea Studios during five overpacked days, were a hundred and forty-eight kids between the ages of ten and seventeen.

A couple of dozen dancing, choreographing, acting, and singing counsellors rushed the kids to "Chorus Calls" and "Dance Calls" and "Showcase Rehearsals," as well as short workshops in improv, mime, mask, makeup, combat, and how-to-rip-off-hit-melodies-with-your-own-lyrics. The kids paid eight hundred and seventy-five dollars each for the five days, sans travel or lodging. They came from half the states in the country and from several foreign countries. Each kid wore a black T-shirt bearing a white star and his or her name in red, and clutched a professional-looking, custom-abridged script for "Oklahoma!" or "State Fair" or "On the Town." Every script included a list entitled "How to Succeed at Camp Broadway":

1. Be ready—on time and prepared.
2. Be responsible—for yourself and your belongings.
3. Be smart—don't chew gum.
4. Be attentive—listen quietly when others are talking.
5. Be a pro—work hard and always give 100%.
6. Be positive—never judge yourself or others.
7. Be safe—take care of your body in all that you do during the day.
8. Be brave—take risks so you can learn new skills.
9. Be respectful—of yourself and your fellow classmates while they take risks and learn new skills.
10. Be-lieve—in yourself!

"We have a formula," said Tony Parise, the artistic director. "We're not a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camp that discovers talent. We're not Star Search. We offer theatre-loving kids access to real Broadway theatre. Everybody is treated the same. We do five songs from each show. Everybody gets to be in at least two numbers. Everybody gets to sing at least two lines. Everybody is in the finale."

Michelangelo Fano, age thirteen, with a thin face, a thin body, and short bangs, came from Rome with his father, a money manager, and his mother, an interpreter. Michelangelo had a natural, Mastroianni-like ingratiating manner. He was so charged up with camp spirit that he could hardly stand still. His seventeen-year-old brother was spending the week at a Massachusetts soccer camp.

"I am the only one in my family with the passion to be an actor," Michelangelo said. "I learn today to sing for the song 'Oklahoma!' I step out, and I sing the line 'Plenty of room to swing a rope.' I open my mouth, I hear the song, I sing. The teacher say, 'Big mouth! Big voice.' One hour ago, I did not know how to sing. Now I learn. Now I sing. With big mouth, big voice."

Two years ago, Michelangelo had also attended a two-week-long acting school in Dublin, where his father was spending some time on business. "One week was for film and one week for theatre," he said. "I learned I didn't watch the camera—I had to act like my normal life." Earlier this year, he had a chance not to watch the camera when he got a tiny role in an Italian film. "I am a poor kid," he said. "I have to take a letter to a famous actor, telling him that his wife is unfaithful to him. My mother does not like that I want to be an actor, but my father pushes me a lot."

Valentina Grub, age twelve, came from Egypt, where she is in the seventh grade at the Cairo American College. Her mother is American, her father is German, the manager of Le Royal Meridien hotel in Cairo. She is tall, with light-blue eyes and dark-brown hair, worn in a thick braid down her back. Valentina, too, was in "Oklahoma!," and, after a few hours on the first day, she said she had already learned a lot about acting.

"In sixth grade, in Cairo, I played Lady Macbeth," she said. "I was really good. I played her very strong, very heavy. She pushed her husband, then she couldn't take it anymore, the blood on her hands, and she goes crazy. She loved herself more than her husband, very selfishly. It was very depressing. I remember only two lines from the play: 'To bed, to bed. What's done cannot be undone.' In seventh grade, I recited the Queen's poem from 'Hamlet' about Ophelia's suicide. I remember the whole poem. That one is very depressing, too." In "Oklahoma!" she had been given a solo line—"Whatcha gonna do when he talks that way?"—from the song "I Cain't Say No." "It's more fun than playing Lady Macbeth," Valentina said. "It's really uplifting, happy, and joyful."

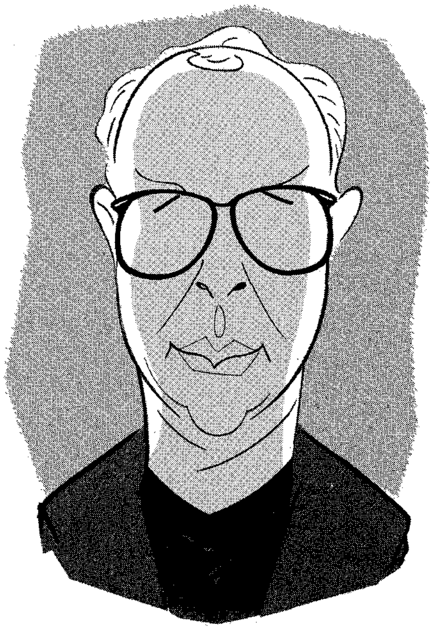
With their solo lines in place, Michelangelo and Valentina were satisfied with what they had learned. They took only a few minutes to memorize the Broadway Camp song, in 4/4 time: "Ev-'ry-one's a star at Camp Broadway . . ." For the finale, on a real stage at the Fashion Institute of Technology theatre, all the campers planned to give the song big mouth and big voice.

—*Lillian Ross*

COLLABORATION TEMPTED

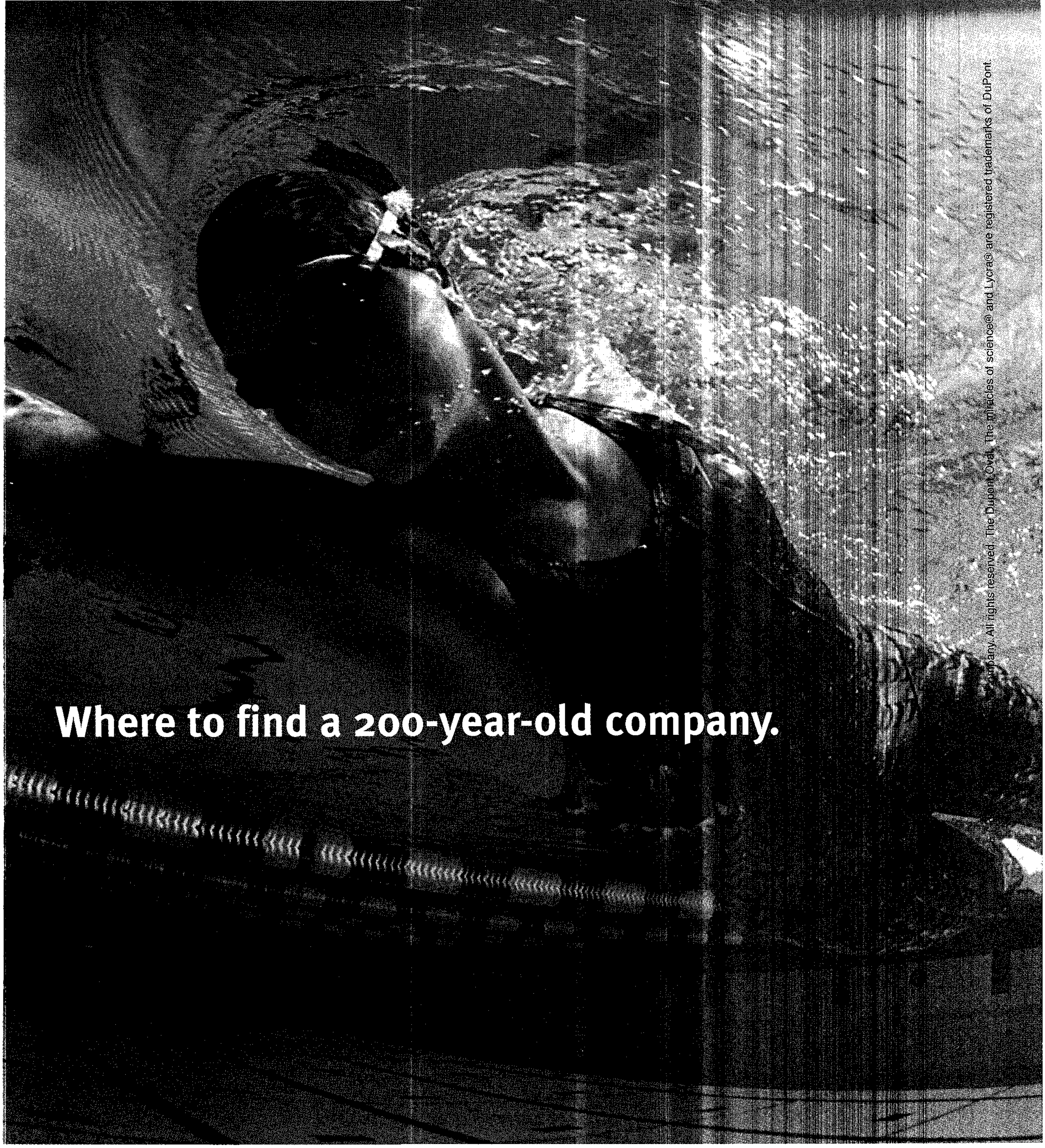
On a hot day in early August, under the large tent that provides rehearsal and working spaces at the Watermill Center, in Watermill, Long Island, about forty-five people were waiting for Robert Wilson. As anyone who has worked with Wilson or attended one of his visionary theatre productions knows, for him time is a relative phenomenon. "The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin," an opera performed in the nineteen-seventies, had a running time of just under twelve hours. His 1998 staging of "Lohengrin," at the Metropolitan Opera, made Wagner's seem like a blackout sketch. This group had gathered for an introductory workshop on "The Temptation of St. Anthony," by Gustave Flaubert, one of six new Wilson productions being developed at Watermill this summer, and the dramaturge surprised nearly everyone by arriving when he'd said he would, a few minutes after noon.

Wilson is a big man, six-four and, at sixty years old, a bit fuller in the middle than he used to be, and he was sensibly dressed, in khaki shorts and a navy polo shirt. He sat down at a long table and began by asking everybody to say who they were, where they came from, and what they were doing there. Actors, singers, dancers and choreographers, filmmakers, musicians, costume designers, and his own principal associates complied, naming many countries of origin, on several continents. "Where is Christopher?" Wilson asked at one point. Someone volunteered that Christopher Knowles, a veteran Wilson performer, was "writing a poem," and would be there shortly. Wilson, who speaks in a deliberate, resonant voice, then talked briefly about the St. Anthony project, which is being sponsored by the Aventis Foundation, in Germany, and will be produced by the Ruhr Triennale festival, near Essen, next June. "We had a study group on it in 1999, in which we discussed the life sciences of the twenty-first century," he said. "Most recently, I've been speaking to Bernice Reagon, about working with her to take the nineteenth-century Flaubert text and make it pertinent to today, through her music."



Robert Wilson

He nodded to Bernice Johnson Reagon, a serene-looking woman in a yellow-and-black dashiki, who was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seated across the table from him, and asked her to say a little about her work. Reagon said that she tried to operate from a core of African-American musical traditions, in a cultural context that acknowledges other traditions. "We want to make it clear that we are not alone, and that we don't want to be alone, and that we don't even need to be in charge," she said. The "we" in question is Sweet Honey in the Rock, the a-cappella group that she formed in 1973 in Washington, D.C., where she lives. Reagon also wanted to say that she was not entirely happy with the story of St. Anthony and his temptations. "The way I read the story," she said, "the man represents an extreme position as being the center. He seems to think that the more pure you can be, the more you deprive yourself of every possible thing that would make you human, then the closer you get to God. It includes self-mutilation and beating yourself up. He doesn't see that God could never be an extreme position. He does not have a *clue*."

Everybody laughed at this. Wilson asked Reagon if she'd like to play some of her music. She took out three CDs, and wonderful, rich, soaring voices filled the tent. Sue Jane Stoker, Wilson's stage manager, then read a synopsis of the play's fourteen scenes, which described Anthony's journey through the world in the company of his favorite pupil, Hilarion, who turns out to be the Devil. Wilson, who had been making pencil notes and sketches on a pad, asked Reagon whether she thought there should be spoken text in the play, or whether it should all be sung. She said that she once placed the cast in the audience and had them dialogue with the characters onstage. "It's an incredible thing, when you're sitting there and the person beside you starts to sing, and you have to move aside to let the person get up and go to the front," she said. Wilson loved that idea. "What if the chorus were like birds that came into the room?" he asked. "Birds in flight, leading us on. What would that sound like? Can you sing it?" Reagon sang softly, in what sounded a lot like birdsong. Wilson asked if she could do seabirds. "Don't ask me to do that," she said, to much laughter. Wilson told an associate to cast fourteen people as birds for the next day's workshop. Turning back to Reagon, he said, "Incidentally, I thought almost all the music you played today is usable."

The session continued until three-thirty, when a rustic cowbell announced lunch. Everybody moved to another open tent space, up the hill, where a delicious meal of cold steak, salad, and sweet mashed potatoes was served cafeteria style. At lunch, Reagon was asked how she had come to be connected with the project. "I didn't get connected," she said. "I didn't know who Bob Wilson was. He sent me two letters from Germany, wanting to talk to me about doing some music, but I didn't respond. I'd lost my assistant, and I was very busy. But then Bill T. Jones, the dancer, called me, and said, 'Bob Wilson is a really nice person, and you should work with him.' That same week, I think, he flew down to Washington, and we met for thirty minutes before he had to catch a plane to Europe. He sketched some storyboards. I really liked his mind. The next time we met, it was for two hours, in Washington. They'd sent me a book on him, and so forth. I told him I wasn't sure I wanted to work on this subject, this monk on a mountain. I don't like any of the women in the story. But I left the meeting thinking the door was open, and that anything might be possible. He wanted to do a ten-day workshop in July. I told him that these three days in August were the only days I had, so he said all right. Anyway, I've decided that in these three days I'll find out whether I'm connected or not."

—*Calvin Tomkins*

STARBUCKS ROBBERS SERVE UP COFFEE

MONROE, WASH.—A man and woman robbed a busy Starbucks early yesterday morning and wound up serving coffee through the drive-up window for at least 30 minutes to make additional cash. They then waited until business slowed enough to make a getaway.

—*Seattle Post-Intelligencer.*

RICHMOND HEIGHTS, MO.—Two middle-aged men broke into a Baby Gap Thursday and directed the frightened staff to "really push the gingham checked romper set." In the course of the morning, the store was able to reduce its considerable overstock by eighteen per cent, and by noon sales were better than they'd been since Thanksgiving. The men pocketed the money and slipped out during their mandatory fifteen-minute coffee break, ignoring desperate pleas from the store supervisor to "come back" and "apply for the assistant-manager openings."

LEXINGTON, KY.—A man and a woman entered Toyota Motor Manufacturing's annual board meeting on Friday and assumed control of North American production. They immediately slashed twenty-seven hundred jobs at five domestic facilities and announced plans to streamline key supply pathways by early 2003. The thieves disappeared as Toyota stock rose eight and a half points in heavy afternoon trading.

SANTA MONICA, CALIF.—Two women ran past security at M-G-M headquarters and handed a note to an executive assistant. In the note, the criminals expressed disappointment with M-G-M's lacklustre spring at the box office, and pitched a romantic comedy centering on the life of a twenty-something travel agent, to be played by either Reese Witherspoon or Jennifer Lopez. Joel Schumacher is slated to direct.

SOMERVILLE, MASS.—Two men forced their way into the offices of the Coalition for Refugee Advocacy and refused to leave until they had addressed and labelled eight hundred urgent fund-raising appeals. They later used a personal credit card to order a new printer, replacing the group's temperamental nine-year-old dot matrix, a shaken volunteer reported.

CHICAGO—Three teen-agers accosted an elderly woman at knifepoint yesterday and demanded that she try the vitamin supplement glucosamine with chondroitin for her joint pain. She quickly obliged them, and there has since been a noticeable decrease in her over-all soreness.

LAS VEGAS—A thirty-five-year-old carjacker stayed at home yesterday and wrote a love poem for his parents' anniversary.

—*Jesse Lichtenstein*

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ANNALS OF DRINKING

DRY MARTINI

The ultimate cocktail, down cold.

BY ROGER ANGELL

The Martini is in, the Martini is back—or so young friends assure me. At Angelo and Maxie's, on Park Avenue South, a thirtyish man with backswept Gordon Gekko hair lowers his cell as the bartender comes by and says, "Eddie, gimme a Bombay Sapphire, up." At Patroon, a possibly married couple want two dirty Tanquerays—gin Martinis straight up, with the bits and leavings of a bottle of olives stirred in. At Nobu, a date begins with a saketini—a sake Martini with (avert your eyes) a sliver of cucumber on top. At Lotus, at the Merc Bar, and all over town, extremely thin young women hold their stemmed cocktail glasses at a little distance from their chests and avidly watch the shining oil twisted out of a strip of lemon peel spread across the pale surface of their gin or vodka Martini like a gas stain from an idling outboard. They are thinking Myrna Loy, they are thinking Nora Charles and Ava Gardner, and they are keeping their secret, which is that it was the chic shape of the glass—the slim narcissus stalk rising to a 1939 World's Fair triangle above—that drew them to this drink. Before their first Martini ever, they saw themselves here with an icy Mart in one hand, sitting on a barstool, one leg crossed over the other, in a bar small enough so that a cigarette can be legally held in the other, and a curl of smoke rising above the murmurous conversation and the laughter. Heaven. The drink itself was a bit of a problem—that stark medicinal bite—but mercifully you can get a little help for that now with a splash of scarlet cranberry juice thrown in, or with a pink-grapefruit-cassis Martini, or a green-apple Martini, or a flat-out chocolate Martini, which makes you feel like a grownup twelve years old. All they are worried about—the tiniest dash of anxiety—is that this prettily tinted drink might allow someone to look at them and see Martha Stewart. Or that they're drinking a variation on the Cosmopolitan, that Sarah Jessica Parker–"Sex and the City" craze that is so not in anymore.

Not to worry. In time, I think, these young topers will find their way back to the Martini, to the delectable real thing, and become more fashionable than they ever imagined. In the summer of 1939, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at Hyde Park—it was a few weeks before the Second World War began—and as twilight fell F.D.R. said, "My mother does not approve of cocktails and thinks you should have a cup of tea." The King said, "Neither does my mother." Then they had a couple of rounds of Martinis.

I myself might have had a Martini that same evening, at my mother and stepfather's house in Maine, though at eighteen—almost nineteen—I was still young enough to prefer something sweeter, like the yummy, Cointreau-laced Sidecar. The Martini meant more, I knew that much, and soon thereafter, at college, I could order one or mix one with aplomb. As Ogden Nash put it, in "A Drink with Something in It":

> There is something about a Martini,
> A tingle remarkably pleasant;
> A yellow, a mellow Martini;
> I wish I had one at present.
> There is something about a Martini
> Ere the dining and dancing begin,
> And to tell you the truth,
> It is not the vermouth—
> I think that perhaps it's the gin.

In John O'Hara's 1934 novel, "Appointment in Samarra," the doomed hero, Julian English, and his wife, Caroline, observe Christmas with his parents, as usual. They live in the Pennsylvania coal town of Gibbsville, but the Englishes are quality, and before their festive dinner Julian's father, Dr. William English, mixes and serves up midday Martinis; then they have seconds.

In the 1940 classic movie comedy "The Philadelphia Story," the reliable character actor John Halliday plays Kath-

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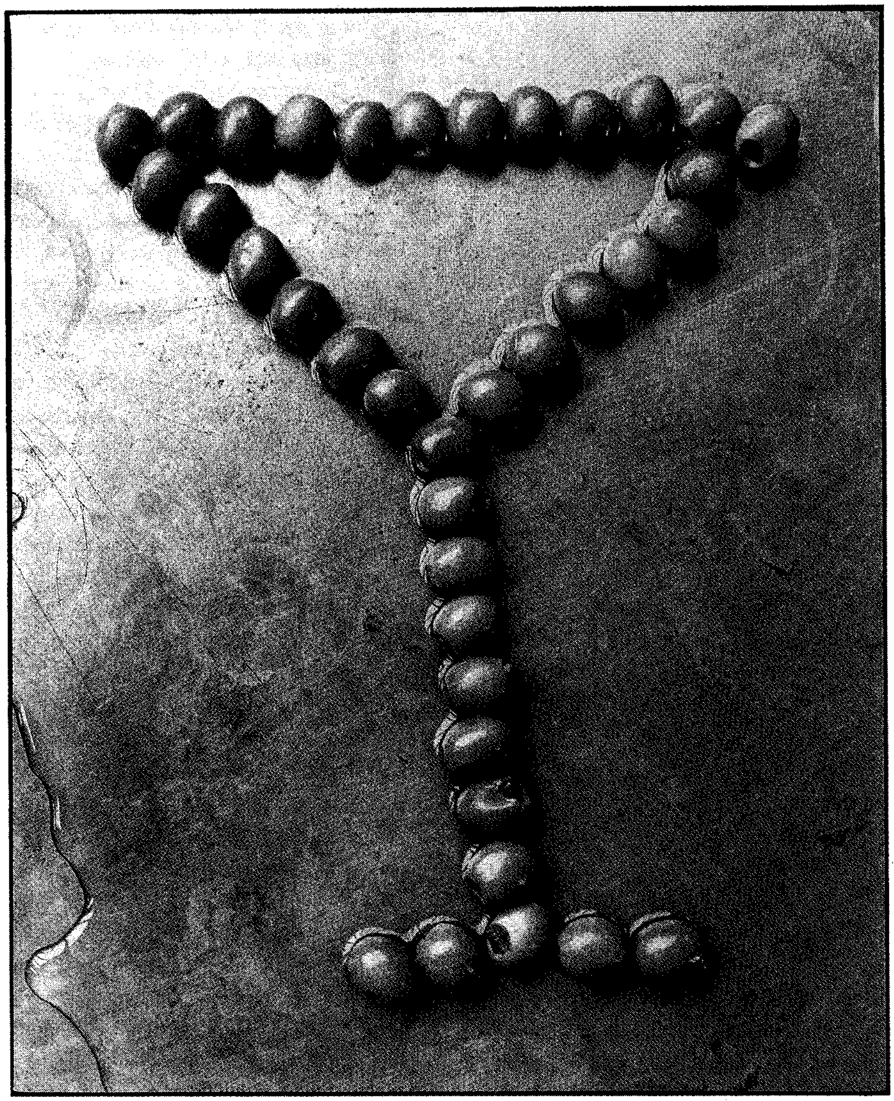
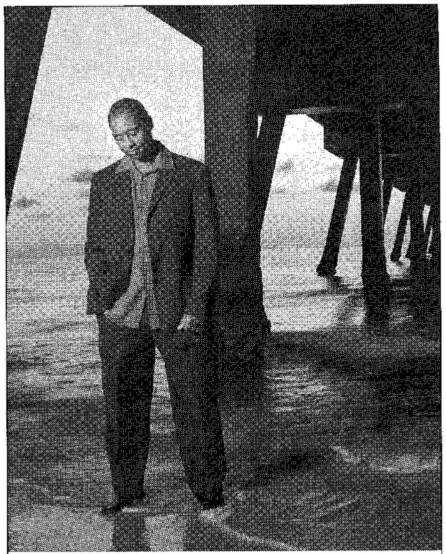


RUVEN AFANADOR

arine Hepburn's reprobate father, who has returned home unexpectedly on the eve of her wedding. Standing on a terrace in the early evening, he mixes and pours a dry Martini for himself and his deceived but accepting wife (Mary Nash) while, at the same time, he quietly demolishes his daughter's scorn for him and some of her abiding hauteur. It's the central scene of the ravishing flick, since it begins Tracy Lord's turnabout from chilly prig Main Line heiress to passably human Main Line heiress, and the Martini is the telling ritual: the presentation of sophistication's Host. Hepburn had played the same part in the Broadway version of the Philip Barry play, a year before, which also required that Martini to be mixed and poured before our eyes. Sitting in the dark at both versions, I was entranced by the dialogue—only Philip Barry could have a seducer-dad convincingly instruct his daughter in morals—but at the same time made certain that the Martini was made right: a slosh of gin, a little vermouth, and a gentle stirring in the pitcher before the pouring and the first sips. Yes, O.K., my Martini-unconscious murmured, but next time maybe a little more ice, Seth.

This is not a joke. Barry's stage business with the bottles and the silver stirring spoon in one moment does away with a tiresome block of explanation about the Lords: he's run off with a night-club singer and she's been betrayed, but they have shared an evening Martini together before this—for all their marriage, in fact—and soon they'll be feeling much better. In the movie, which was directed by George Cukor, the afternoon loses its light as the drink is made and the talk sustained, and the whole tone of the drama shifts. Everyone is dressed for the coming party, and the Martini begins the renewing complications. Sitting in the theatre, we're lit up a little, too, and ready for all that comes next—the dance, the scene



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by the pool—because the playwright has begun things right.

Cocktails at Hyde Park or on Philadelphia's Main Line sound aristocratic, but the Second World War changed our ways. In the Pacific, where I was stationed, a couple of Navy fighter pilots told me a dumb story they'd heard in training, about the tiny survival kit that was handed out to flight-school graduates headed for carrier duty. "Open Only in Extreme Emergency," it said—which seemed to be the case of a pilot north of Midway whose Grumman quit cold a hundred miles away from his flattop. After ditching, he climbed into his inflatable raft, regarded the empty horizon that encircled him, and opened the kit. Inside was a tiny shaker and a glass, a stirring straw, a thimbleful of gin, and an eyedropper's worth of vermouth. He mixed and stirred, and was raising the mini-cocktail to his lips when he became aware that vessels had appeared from every quarter of the Pacific and were making toward him at top speed. The first to arrive, a torpedo boat, roared up, and its commanding officer, shouting through his megaphone, called, "*That's* not the right way to make a dry Martini!"

Dryness was all, dryness was the main debate, and through the peacetime nineteen-forties and fifties we new suburbanites tilted the Noilly Prat bottle with increasing parsimony, as the Martini recipe went up from three parts gin and one part dry vermouth to four and five to one, halted briefly at six to one, and rose again from there. George Plimpton recently reminded me about the Montgomery—a fifteen-to-one Martini named after the British Field Marshal, who was said never to go into battle with less than these odds in his favor. What was happening, of course, was an improvement in the quality of everyday gin. The Frankenstein's-laboratory taste of Prohibition gin no longer needed a sweetener to hide its awfulness: just a few drops of Tribuno or Martini & Rossi Extra Dry would suffice to soften the ginny juniper bite.

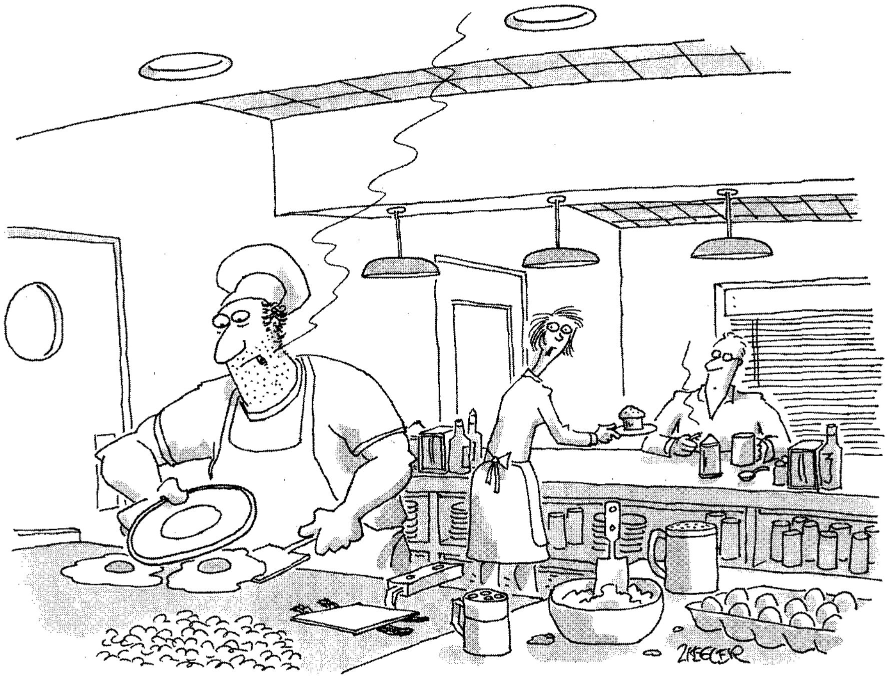
Preciousness almost engulfed us, back then. Tiffany's produced a tiny silver oil can, meant to dispense vermouth. Serious debates were mounted about the cool, urban superiority of the Gibson—a Martini with an onion in it—or the classicism of the traditional olive. Travellers came home from London or Paris with funny stories about the ghastly Martinis they'd been given in the Garrick Club or at the Hotel Regina bar. And, in a stuffy little volume called "The Hour," the historian and *Harper's* columnist Bernard De Voto wrote, "You can no more keep a Martini in the refrigerator than you can keep a kiss there. The proper union of gin and vermouth is a great and sudden glory; it is one of the happiest marriages on earth and one of the shortest."

We appreciated our Martinis, and drank them before lunch and before dinner. I recall an inviting midtown restaurant called Cherio's, where the lunchtime Martini came in chalice-sized glasses. Then we went back to work. "Those noontime cocktails just astound me," a young woman colleague of mine said recently. "I don't know how you did it." Neither do I, anymore. My stepfather, E. B. White, sometimes took a dry Manhattan at lunch, but his evening Martini was a boon forever. Even when he'd gotten into his seventies and early eighties, I can remember his greeting me and my family at the Bangor airport late on a summer afternoon and handing me the keys to the car for the fifty-mile drive back to the coast. Sitting up front beside me, he'd reach for his little picnic basket, which contained a packet of Bremner Wafers, some Brie or Gouda cheese and a knife, and the restorative thermos of Martinis.

At home, my vermouth mantra became "a little less than the absolute minimum," but I began to see that coldness, not dryness, was the criterion. I tried the new upscale gins—Beefeater's and the rest—but found them soft around the edges and went back to my everyday Gordon's. In time, my wife and I shifted from gin to vodka, which was less argumentative. At dinners and parties, I knew all my guests' preferences: the sister-in-law who wanted an "upside-down Martini"—a cautious four parts vermouth to one of gin—and a delightful neighbor who liked her Martinis so much that when I came around to get whiskey or brandy orders after dinner she dared not speak their name. "Well, maybe just a little gin on some ice for me," she whispered. "With a dab of vermouth on top."

We drank a lot, we loved to drink, and some of us did not survive it. Back in college, the mother of a girl I knew would sometimes fix herself a silver shaker of Martinis at lunchtime and head back upstairs to bed. "Good night," she'd say. "Lovely to see you."

I met entire families, two or three generations, who seemed bent on destroying themselves with booze. John Cheever, the Boccaccio of midcentury America, wrote all this in sad and thrilling detail. What seems strange now about celebrated stories of his like "The

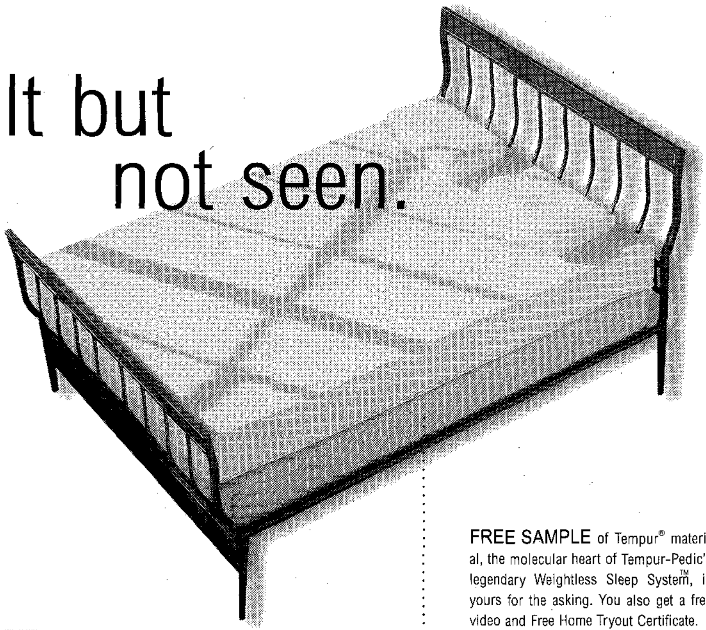


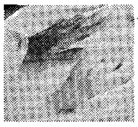
"That's the food biz. Celebrity chef one day, graveyard-shift hash jockey the next."

Country Husband," "The Sorrows of Gin," and "The Swimmer" is how rarely the Martini is mentioned, and how often it's just called gin. Alcohol was central to this landscape, its great descending river.

It's my theory—a guess, rather—that Martini drinking skipped a generation after Vietnam and marijuana came along. Many thousands of earlier suburban children, admitted to the dinner table or watching their parents' parties from the next room, saw and heard the downside of the ritual—the raised voices and lowered control—and vowed to abandon the cocktail hour when they grew up. Some of them still blame Martinis for their parents' divorces. Not until their children arrived and came of age did the slim glass and the delectable lift of the drink reassert itself, and carry us back to the beginning of this story.

I still have a drink each evening, but more often now it's Scotch. When guests come to dinner, there are always one or two to whom I automatically offer Pellegrino or a Coke: their drinking days are behind them. Others ask for water or wait for a single glass of wine with the meal. But if there's a friend tonight with the old predilection, I'll mix up a Martini for the two of us, in the way we like it, filling a small glass pitcher with ice cubes that I've cracked into quarters with my little pincers. Don't smash or shatter the ice: it'll become watery in a moment. Put three or four more cracked cubes into our glasses, to begin the chill. Put the gin or the vodka into the pitcher, then wet the neck of the vermouth bottle with a quickly amputated trickle. Stir the Martini vigorously but without sloshing. When the side of the pitcher is misted like a January windowpane pour the drink into the glasses. Don't allow any of the ice in the pitcher to join the awaiting, unmelted ice in the glass. (My friend likes his straight up, so I'll throw away the ice in his glass. But I save it in my own, because a Martini on the rocks stays cold longer, and I've avoided the lukewarm fourth or fifth sip from the purer potion.) Now stir the drink inside the iced glass, just once around. Squeeze the lemon peel across the surface—you've already pared it, from a fat, bright new lemon—and then run the peel, skin-side down, around the rim of the glass before you drop it in. Serve. Smile. ♦





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BY JOHN SEABROOK

David Karp: one of his obsessions is a "top secret" planting of dragon fruit.

One hot summer day not long ago, just as the specialty food stores around town were putting up "First of the Season" signs to advertise their peaches, a rare and extraordinary shipment of apricots appeared in Manhattan. They were white apricots, which you almost never see in the United States. Unlike the familiar tawny-colored varieties, these had pale, almost translucent skin, with a yellow blush. And, unlike the cottony supermarket fruit, the white apricots tasted great: a rush of sugar, with a complex, slightly acidic aftertaste. The flesh almost melted in your mouth, and the juice was so plentiful that you had to bend over while eating one, to avoid staining your shirt.

The apricots were available at Citarella, which has four branches, and only at Citarella—a fact that pleased the store's produce manager, Gregg Mufson, a great deal. Like his competitors at the other high-end specialty stores around town, such as Eli's, Dean & DeLuca, and Grace's, Mufson tries to titillate his customers by giving them uncommon fruits—curiosities that they may have encountered in a restaurant, on their travels, or on the Food Network. "Anything new, anything different, and if I can get it directly from the grower it's even better, because there's no middleman," said Mufson, who is in his mid-thirties and wears a neatly trimmed goatee. "I want them to go 'Wow!' I want to blow their minds with something. They'll eat these apricots, and they won't forget that taste, and then they'll come back and buy some more of my fruit." Mufson pays attention to the food press, so that he can be sure to have the trendy fruits and vegetables in stock. "When the *Times* did an article on rambutans"—bright-red, golf-ball-size, tendril-covered fruits from Southeast Asia, with translucent, sweet-tart flesh—"we sold ten cases of them in a couple of days." Appearance, he added, is the most important quality in attracting people to new fruit—the more colorful the better—followed by sugar. "Basically, if it's sweet, people like it," he said.

At first, not many customers paid much attention to the new apricots. "That's a white apricot," one of the produce workers in the store said when a customer asked about the fruit. "First one I ever seen," he added. But the customer went for the Apriums—yellow-skinned, pink-fleshed plum-apricot hybrids, which have become popular in the past few years.

Soon, however, word about the white apricots got out. The pastry chef at Citarella thought they were one of the best fruits he'd ever tasted. The chef Daniel Boulud bought two cases of white apricots and was "crazy for them," Mufson said; Boulud used them to make apricot galettes. The owner of Citarella, Joe Gurrera, gave a white apricot to Martha Stewart when she came into the East Hampton branch of the store, and "she was blown away by it," Mufson reported. "Blown a-way." The store sold out of its supply in a couple of days; the next shipment disappeared even more rapidly. Mufson was delighted. "My boss gave me a compliment! My boss never gives me compliments. He said, 'This is the best

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David is David Karp, a sometime "provisioner" for specialty stores like Citarella, and a noted fruit writer. He is the Fruit Detective, a persona he invented around the time he worked as a provisioner for Dean & DeLuca. His job is to range around the country and the world and find exotic fruits, or uncommon varieties of common fruits. In recent years, he has travelled to Madagascar to investigate vanilla, to Sicily to hunt for blood oranges, and to the Australian outback to research bush fruits. But most of his work is performed in California. The Fruit Detective is a familiar figure at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market—he's the one in the pith helmet with the leather chin strap, his fruit knife in a holster on his belt, looking like a slightly demented forest ranger as he interrogates farmers with rapid-fire questions and eats their fruit. Readers of Karp's articles, which appear regularly in the Los Angeles *Times* and *Gourmet*, follow him on his quest for pomelos, Asian pears, mulberries, and persimmons. Most people experience a truly great piece of fruit very rarely—that perfect peach you ate one summer day long ago, a taste you hope for in every subsequent peach you eat but never quite recapture. Karp's goal is to have that experience again and again.

I first heard about the Fruit Detective from a friend, an organic farmer in southern New Jersey named Torrey Reade.

"Anything new on the farm?" I asked her one day about a year ago.

"Well, we had a visit from the Fruit Detective."

"What's a fruit detective?"

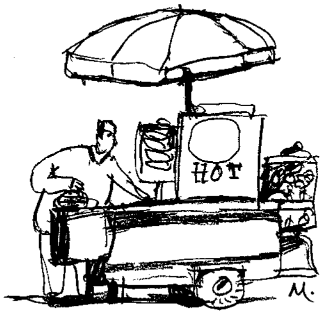
Torrey wasn't sure, exactly, except that the fellow was passionate, almost manic, about fruit. "He left his business card—wait, I think I may have it in my wallet."

The card said "David Karp, Fruit Detective." It had raised lettering that looked slightly crooked, and it gave a residence in Venice, California. The name reminded me that I once knew a David Karp, whose passage from brilliant Upper East Side private-school kid to heroin addict was a sad but familiar story of money, drugs, and wasted talent. I stood there rubbing my finger over the lettering, wondering what had become of that David Karp, while Torrey described her encounter.

"We were trying to grow Charentais melons," she explained, "which is a French exotic, and he had heard about us from a health-food store in Princeton. Somehow he found us and came down to see about getting some for Dean & DeLuca. He was wearing this funny hat and shorts—no one in South Jersey wears shorts in the summertime, because of the bugs. We showed him our melons, which he liked but didn't love, and then he started asking, 'What else do you have?' So we told him about the pear tree that was growing near the old privy. He demanded to see it immediately. It produces these tiny, inedible pears, but he thought it might be an heirloom variety and got very excited—he was actually hopping around in the weeds."

The more she described the Fruit Detective, the more he sounded like my David Karp. I kept the card and, over the winter, sent the Fruit Detective an e-mail. After he confirmed that he was the person I was thinking of, we talked on the phone and made plans to have lunch the next time he came to New York on "fruit work."

I hadn't known David Karp well, but I had heard a lot about him from some friends who had grown up with him in Manhattan and told memorable Karp stories. Karp's father, Harvey Karp, was an extraordinarily successful businessman, whose house in East Hampton was reputed to be a palace. David was brilliant. He was fluent in Latin, and, it was said, read only the poets of late antiquity. He published a translation of the sixth-century writer Venantius Fortunatus when he was twenty. Not only did he get 800s on the S.A.T.s but he got 800s on a friend's S.A.T.s, too—and he did it while coming down from LSD. He also knew more about punk rock than any of his friends, and he was well versed in drugs.



After graduating from Wesleyan, in 1979 (word of the S.A.T. caper had got back to the authorities, and he and his friend were suspended for a year, but he finished in three years), Karp worked on Wall Street in risk arbitrage and option trading, where he was soon making more than a hundred thousand dollars a year. He collected rare books and rare wines. He produced a Lydia Lunch album, "13.13," in 1982, and cultivated friends in the downtown rock world. But his dabbling in heroin had turned into an every-weekend habit, and in 1984, after drugs were found in his desk at work, Karp got fired. At this point, a less apocalyptic spirit might have stepped back from the dark side; Karp moved into the Hôtel Plaza Athénée in Paris with his fashion-model girlfriend and a supply of heroin, and indulged in a life of total hedonism—sleeping all day, living off pastries from Lenôtre, getting high and staying up all night reading St. Augustine (in Latin), and, when his drugs ran out, taking the Concorde back to New York to buy some more. Eventually, he ran through most of his money and returned to New York, where he was soon supporting his habit by selling off his book collection and by dealing heroin to friends and friends of friends.

Karp has been completely sober—no drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes—for almost twelve years. In 1990, after waking up on a floor strewn with broken glass and Cap'n Crunch cereal ("Junkies love sweet stuff"), he had allowed his parents to put him in detox at Gracie Square Hospital, and he then spent seven months in rehab in Southern California, doing the twelve-step program. On returning to the world, he called up a college friend, Eric Asimov, who writes the "$25 and Under" column for the *Times*, and proposed a freelance piece about apricots. Fruit was connected in Karp's mind to the great love of his life, a woman he had met in college, with whom he had shared an interest in collecting fruit-crate art and the elaborately decorated wrappers around blood oranges. "I thought it would intrigue her if I became a fruit

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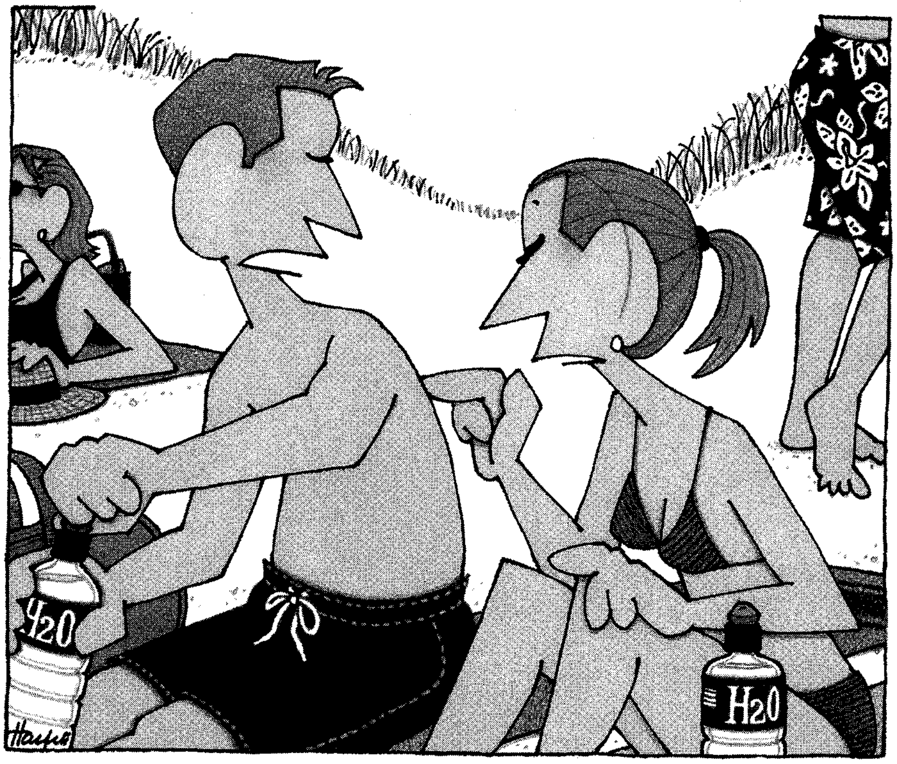


“Oh, that. That’s a design flaw.”

• •

expert,” he explained. He’d try to find great fruit, and woo her with it. He got the fruit, but not the woman. “This is very pathetic,” he told me. “The story of unrequited love. But what can I say? She was the love of my life.” In the course of pursuing her, he began amassing “dossiers” on different fruits, which contained the names of thousands of fruit growers, breeders, marketers, wholesalers, and retailers. Ten years later, he is a unique source of information on the fruit industry—a vital link between the “knowers” who love obscure fruit and the “growers” who cultivate it.

Karp moved to California in 1999, because that’s where so much of the nation’s fruit comes from, and he lives in a small cottage in Venice with his cat, Sahara, who, he is convinced, once saved him from dying of an overdose by licking his face until he woke up. When he isn’t searching for fruit, he collects books about fruit, compiles songs about fruit, and corresponds with fruit lovers all over the world—chefs, specialty stores, and amateur fruit enthusiasts who simply want to know the difference between a Pluot, an Aprium, and a plumcot. Does he have any other interests? Aardvarks, Karp says. “I love them, because most people think they’re unattractive, but I think they’re incredibly soulful.” Once, when he was visiting the Philadelphia Zoo, he climbed into the anteater pen, hoping to commune with the animals, but instead experienced “a nasty confrontation with the business end of an anteater.”

We met in April. In the intervening years, Karp had lost the hair on the top of his head. “I’ve grown glabrous,” he said, using the term of art for a fuzzless nectarine. He looked very fit, not at all like a former junkie—more like a guy who eats a lot of fruit.

Over lunch, he told me that he had recently wrapped up a research project on bitter almonds (“I’m not, generally speaking, a nut enthusiast”) and was hot on the trail of European greengage plums, which are common abroad but extremely rare in the United States. “Have you had one? Oh, my God, you’ll die when you taste one—it’s an atom bomb of flavor. I’m convinced there’s a small planting somewhere in California, and I won’t stop until I find it.” He didn’t eat much of his pasta, and what he did eat he liberally coated with dried chili peppers, a shaker of which he carries in his black canvas bag. He scolded me for drinking a Coke: “That stuff is bad for you. Have you ever seen what it will do to a penny?”

After he had finished his lunch, he said, “O.K., ready to eat some mind-blowing fruit?” It is Karp’s custom, whenever he meets people for a meal, to bring along remarkable fruit. Eric Asimov recalls an occasion when the Fruit Detective turned up with a bright-red fruit from West Africa called a miracle fruit (*Synsepalum dulcificum*), which, Karp said, had a startling effect on the taste buds: for an hour after you’ve eaten it, even the sourest foods taste sweet. “I tried one, and then I ate a sour lemon,” Asimov said. “I was stunned at how sweet it became.”

Karp took from his bag a large, heart-shaped, scaly greenish fruit that I had never seen before—a cherimoya, a fruit native to South America. Taking out his grapefruit knife, he concentrated his full attention on slicing into the white, custardy flesh and peeling several sections for me. The focus he brought to this task, the specialized equipment he used, and the obvious tactile pleasure he took in the procedure, combined with the prospect of an imminent mind-blowing experience, were all powerfully reminiscent of the David Karp of twenty years ago. And, as promised, the fruit was amazing.

One day in 1962, a Mormon missionary walked into a Safeway in Los Angeles and asked for a Chinese gooseberry. The produce manager didn’t know what that was, so he asked the main produce buyer for Safeway, who, in turn, called Frieda Caplan, the founder of Frieda’s Finest, a local wholesaler of specialty produce items. She didn’t know, either. A few months later, a broker representing New Zealand farmers was walking around the L.A. wholesale produce market, trying to sell Chinese gooseberries. The other produce buyers weren’t interested, but Caplan, remembering the Safeway buyer’s query, said, “I’ll take all you’ve got,” and that turned out to be two thousand four hundred pounds. “No one is ever going to buy something called a Chinese gooseberry," a shipping official told Caplan. The rind of the gooseberries was kind of furry and reminded him of New Zealand's national bird, so he suggested naming the fruit after it—the kiwi.

People who grow and market unusual fruits tell that story a lot, usually as a way of illustrating the potential that exists in the American marketplace for something new. Although the United States is the most ethnically diverse country on earth, that diversity is not reflected in the fruit stocked by the average supermarket. The mango, which is one of the most popular fruits worldwide, is not among the top ten American fruits (which are, in descending order, bananas, apples, watermelons, oranges, cantaloupes, grapes, grapefruit, strawberries, peaches, and pears). Our vegetables are considerably more diverse than our fruits. Portobello mushrooms, arugula, fennel, radicchio, mesclun, Swiss chard, and jicama—all specialty items ten years ago—are now in American supermarkets across the country, but sapotes, litchis, and loquats are not. American travellers in Asia and Latin America find many delicious fruits—jackfruit, longan, and breadfruit—that are never available fresh at home. This is because the United States Department of Agriculture has outlawed the importing of certain foreign-grown tropical fruits to prevent the spread of tropical pests. But two years ago the U.S.D.A. began allowing papayas and rambutans grown in Hawaii to be imported to the mainland after they had been treated with electron beams—the same process that neutralizes anthrax spores in the mail (though anthrax requires a much higher dose). The new technology, many in the exotic-fruit world believe, will greatly expand Americans' awareness of the fruit that the rest of the world eats, and bring a cornucopia of new items to the produce department.

Part of being a fruit detective means figuring out what will be the next kiwi. That's not Karp's only interest; he spends at least as much time tracking down the classic varieties of familiar fruits as he does sleuthing exotics. But the intrigue and potential payoff implicit in the next big fruit are irresistible. When I saw Karp in April, he was enthusiastic about the prospects of the pitahaya, which is grown in Central America and in Asia, where it's known as dragon fruit. He talked up dragon fruit during his meeting with Gregg Mufson, of Citarella, a few days after our lunch. "Giant, flaming-pink, spineless member of the cactus-pear family, the most spectacular-looking fruit I've ever seen," Karp told Mufson, practically spitting with excitement. He said that, while some varieties aren't so tasty—"they taste like a snow cone, like they were made of gelatinized mousse with sugar"—others are much more interesting: the magenta-colored flesh has the texture and flavor of watermelon, sometimes with a hint of strawberry.

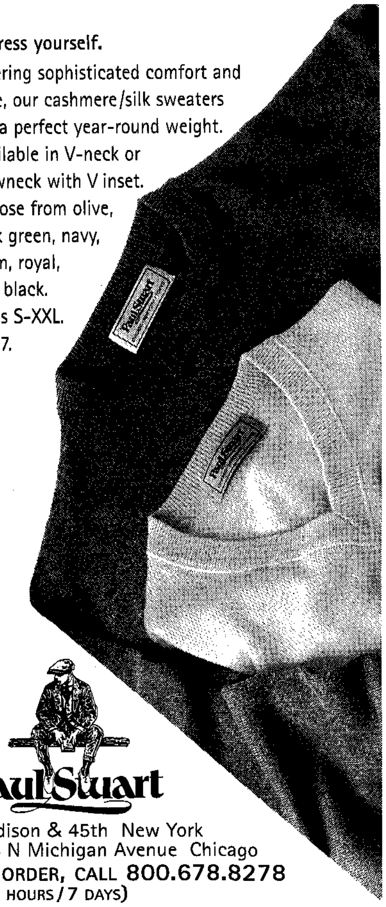
Mufson was initially skeptical about dragon fruit, but after listening to Karp he got more curious.

"Know where we can get some?" he asked.

"I have a connection," Karp said, with a manic gleam in his eye.

Karp told Mufson that although no foreign-grown pitahayas were currently allowed into the country, he knew of a "top secret" planting, which was about three hours south of Los Angeles, outside the desert town of Borrego Springs. The planting was a partnership among a specialty-produce grower, Kevin Coniff, who had propagated a variety of pitahaya for Southern California; a farmer, Thomas Antel, who owns the land where the pitahaya plants were growing; and a large wholesaler of fresh produce, D'Arrigo Brothers, which was putting up the money. The reason the pitahaya planting was secret was that the partnership, or "consortium," as Karp delighted in calling it, was trying to develop an exclusive American market for dragon fruit, and they didn't want their plans publicized before they were ready. "It's like opening a movie in L.A. or New York. They'll want to get it into fancy markets and affluent areas, with a lot of foodies and food press, and the word spreads from there."

Mufson said that D'Arrigo Brothers had done something similar with broccoli rabe. Over the past ten years, the company created hardier varieties of broccoli rabe, so that what was once a specialty item has become available year round, with D'Arrigo Brothers controlling most of the distribution. "Nearly all the broccoli rabe that comes into New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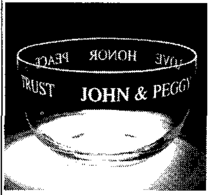

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York, the D'Arrigos handle it," Mufson said.

Karp slapped his fist into his palm. "They're up to the same thing with dragon fruit!" he exclaimed. "Boy, this sounds like a case for the Fruit Detective, if ever there was one."

Mufson stared at him. He had never met anyone like the Fruit Detective before.

In mid-June, I flew out to Los Angeles and joined Karp for five days of fruit work. Before this trip, I imagined that David Karp was a man who had been redeemed by fruit—someone who had found in fruit a way of escaping his demons. What I came to realize over the course of our five days together—five very long days—was that Karp had not really banished his demons at all. He'd just found a way of channelling his particular needs and talents (the desire for esoteric knowledge, the pursuit of extreme pleasure, a sympathy for shady characters, and experience in dope dealing) into a career as a purveyor of amazing fruit—a career, it turns out, that serves those needs and talents very nicely.

Much of our time together was spent in the cramped cab of Bessie, as Karp calls his white Ford Ranger pickup truck, which became ever more cramped as it filled with fruit during our travels. Days began early and ended late, but Karp was never tired. "All I need is my morning fruit fix," he'd say cheerfully, offering me a slice of "exquisite" Snow Queen white nectarine from Reedley, California, as I blearily slid into the cab.

We stopped at farmers' markets and roadside stands along the way. Karp has been known to conduct stakeouts of certified farmers' markets that he suspects of being "cheaters" (farmers who buy fruit from wholesalers, remove the stickers, and sell it as their own); if he finds proof, he may publish the cheaters' names in the L.A. *Times*. We didn't catch any on our trip, but when Karp found people selling fruit that was inaccurately labelled he would instruct them on its true heritage. In one market, he found farmers from Vera Ranch, near Vallejo, selling plums called mirabelles, which, he explained to the woman behind the counter, weren't mirabelles but myrobalans. "These are much too large, totally out of season, and there is a tartness in the skin of mirabelles these don't have, and mirabelles generally have a clingstone"—a pit that is attached to the flesh.

"Wow," said the woman. "You know your stuff."

In the truck, we talked of fruit constantly. Karp is especially passionate about stone fruit—apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums, and cherries—and, because it was cherry and apricot season, we spent a lot of time on those fruits. We discussed the genealogy of different varieties, and the way the great varieties were described in the works of fruit literature that Karp most admires—chiefly, Robert Hogg's "The Fruit Manual: A Guide to the Fruits and Fruit Trees of Great Britain" (fifth edition, 1884) and Edward A. Bunyard's "The Anatomy of Dessert" (1929). Karp quoted, from memory, passages about the "melting" quality Bunyard prized; after a while, it was hard to tell when he was quoting and when he wasn't. "At its ripest, it is drunk rather than eaten," he'd say, referring to Coe's Golden Drop plum. Discussing the transparent gage, he pronounced, "A slight flush of red and then one looks into the depths of transparent amber as one looks into an opal, uncertain how far the eye can penetrate." If I got something wrong or forgot a point about fruit made in an earlier conversation, Karp was quick to correct me. By the end of five days of fruit talk in the fruitmobile, I was counting the minutes to the time I could say goodbye and not have to talk about fruit anymore.

I also watched Karp eat a lot of fruit. I saw him grazing in a cherry orchard with the farmer, who, after sampling cherries for half an hour, had to run for the bathroom. Craig Ledbetter, an apricot breeder with the Department of Agriculture, whom we met near Fresno, said, "David eats fruit that I wouldn't touch, and I eat a lot of fruit. Soft, half-rotten stuff on the ground—he has no problem putting that into his mouth."

On our first day, we drove down to Borrego Springs, in the hope of seeing the pitahaya planting. But Thomas Antel, the landowner, would let us view the plants only from across the road. Karp, clad in his pith helmet, attempted to extract information from Antel about the consortium's intentions. (When I asked later if the pith helmet was necessary, Karp said that he was always get-

EYES

My most honorable eyes. You are not in the best shape.
I receive from you an image less than sharp,
And if a color, then it's dimmed.
And you were a pack of royal hounds
With whom I would set forth in the early morning.
My wondrously quick eyes, you saw many things,
Countries and cities. Islands and oceans.
Together we greeted immense sunrises,
When the fresh air invited us to run
Along trails just dry from cold night dew.
Now what you have seen is hidden inside
And changed into memory or dreams.
Slowly I move away from the fair of this world
And I notice in myself a distaste
For monkeyish dress, shrieks, and drumbeats.
What a relief. Alone with my meditation
On the basic similarity of humans
And their tiny grain of dissimilarity.
Without eyes, my gaze is fixed on one bright point
That grows large and takes me in.

—*Czeslaw Milosz*

(*Translated, from the Polish, by the author, Carol Milosz, and Renata Gorczynski.*)

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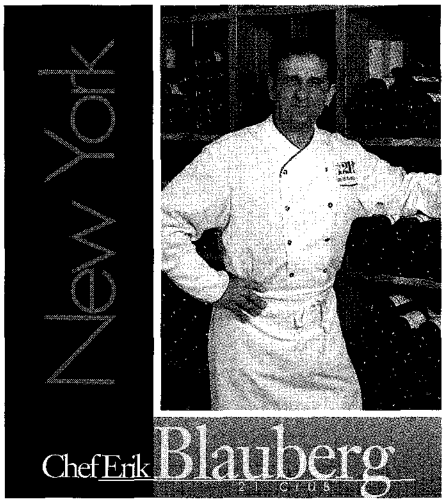

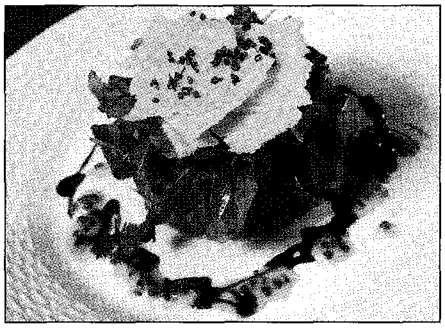

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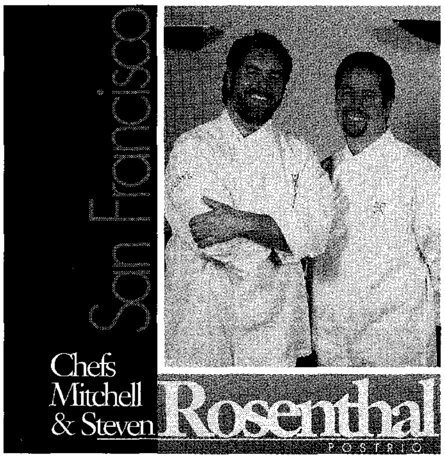

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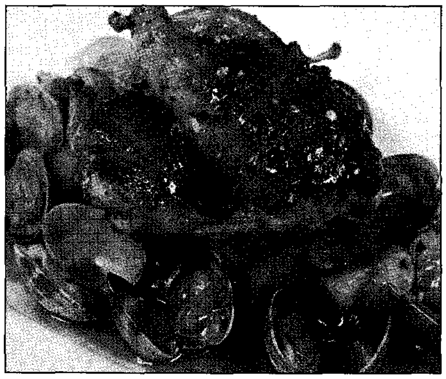

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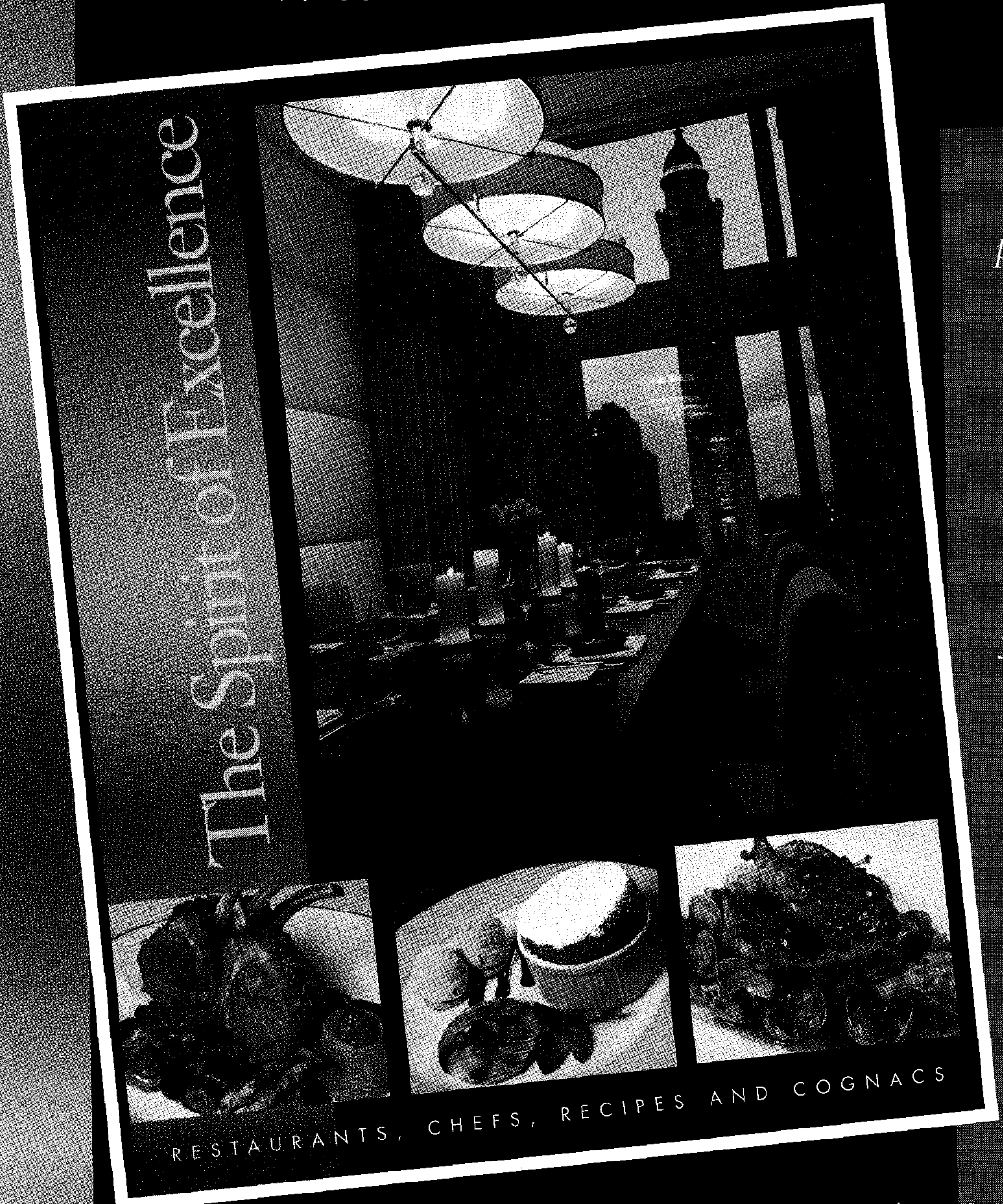

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ting clobbered by falling fruit, and that last year in Hawaii he had been struck on the head from the height of twenty feet by a durian—a delicious but terrible-smelling fruit familiar in Asia. "Without my helmet, that durian would have killed me," he said.)

"So how are the plants doing?" Karp asked, taking out his notebook.

"It's a learning experience, David, a learning experience," Antel said, looking nervously at the notes Karp was taking. "What can I tell you? I wish I could show you the plants, but there's too much money involved to screw this up." He rubbed his face hard with both hands, and his mood seemed to darken. "People feel a sense of entitlement, like they can just come down here and see what we're doing."

Karp was undaunted. "Where did the breeder get his breeding stock from?" he demanded. "Because they say there are some varieties that taste better than others."

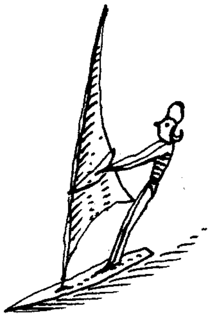
"They may be right, David, they may be right. Look, I can't talk about this. There's some very big players involved in this thing, and they don't care who gets hurt—that's just the way it is."

The agricultural landscape in which the Fruit Detective travels is made up mostly of small organic fruit-growing operations—farms of mainly a hundred acres or less, many of which produce the older varieties of plums, apricots, peaches, and apples that were loved by generations of Americans before the coming of the hardier but flavorless supermarket varieties. These farmers survive by looking for niches. A niche could be a classic variety of fruit that the big commercial growers don't produce, such as the Blenheim apricot, which is, in the Fruit Detective's opinion, one of the best-tasting fruits in the world. Or a niche could be a brief window of time in the growing season of a particular item when the commercial producers don't have any fruit and the small farmer can name his price. But since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, in 1994, many of the larger growers of commodity fruits, such as tomatoes and mangoes, are finding that they can't compete with the cheaper labor and production costs in Mexico, and so they are also looking for niches in order to survive.

"The marketing window keeps getting smaller and smaller," said Andy Mariani, who farms eighty acres, most of which are devoted to cherries—Black Republican and Rainier, among other varieties—in the Santa Clara Valley. "We used to have a window here between cherries from Stockton and cherries from Washington. First, it was a couple of weeks, then a couple of days. Now it's almost nothing. The Stockton growers use sprays to retard the ripening process, so they can sell when the price is highest." Mariani's cherry harvest was in full swing on the day we visited, and, as a result of an abrupt downturn in cherry prices caused by the Stockton farmers, he had lost his "candy bar"—an expression sometimes used in the fruit world to describe a lucrative crop. "We just lost seventy-five thousand dollars in one day," Mariani said. "I would have been better off in the stock market."

Karp worships farmers like Mariani and, as a writer, takes every opportunity to promote their efforts. Eric Asimov said recently, "David is more like a wine writer than like a food writer. He brings that level of connoisseurship and obsessive attention to detail—the importance of the soil, the cultivation methods, and the growing region. Wine writers talk about the importance of *terroir*, or place; David is the first writer to bring that concept to fruit." He added, "Grape growers make the cover of wine magazines, but you never read about the great peach or cherry growers, except in David's pieces."

Most food writing is about cooking—it's less about the ingredients than about the rendering of those ingredients, and the consuming of them in communal settings. Karp is interested in the primal act of tasting—eating fruit right from the tree, vine, or bush. ("I'm not a foodie," he says. "I'm a fruitie.") His goal is sensual pleasure, but he has a rarefied idea of what fruit should taste like. The particular kind of taste he's after is one that the nineteenth-century writers on fruit described as "high flavor"—a fecund, almost gamy taste that, according to Karp, has been all but lost as fruits have been bred for mass production and long-distance shipping. "High flavor is the flavor of a pheasant, hung until high," he said. "You bite into the fruit, you taste the sugar, the texture, the acidity, and there's an almost overpowering aroma. That's what fruit should taste like. But Americans don't know that, because most of the fruit we eat is trash fruit." A real peach, allowed to ripen on the tree, is too fragile to withstand the rigors of a cross-country journey by truck or train, and so breeders have created low-acid, high-sugar peaches, which can be picked when they're still very hard but still taste sort of sweet.



We found the white apricots on a small farm in Brentwood, about an hour east of San Francisco. The farmer was Ross Sanborn, who is eighty-two years old. He wore faded denim overalls and had a full head of white hair and a face deeply browned from years in the sun. ("Hey, looks like you're going on a safari!" he said when he saw Karp.) Sitting in the shade of his porch, Sanborn told us that he had been trying to breed white apricots for almost thirty years, working with plant material he obtained from Morocco and Iran in the nineteen-seventies. Finally, he said, he believed he had come up with what he'd hoped was "the perfect 'cot." He called it an Angelcot.

After we had finished talking, we followed Sanborn out to the part of the orchard where the white apricots were growing. Karp went up to a tree, picked an Angelcot from it, and held it in the tips of his long fingers, caressing the velvety "pubescence," which is the fruitie term for the fuzz. "There's something so sensuous about apricots—of all the fruits, they are the most like a woman's breast," he said, denying himself the pleasure of tasting the fruit as long as he could. He unsheathed his fruit knife, neatly halved the 'cot, and examined the pit. Then he bent at the waist and brought the pitless half up to his mouth, inhaled, and bit. The fruit melted. The juice ran down his chin. A bite, then another bite, and all that remained of the apricot were the bits of flesh sticking to the Fruit Detective's face. ♦

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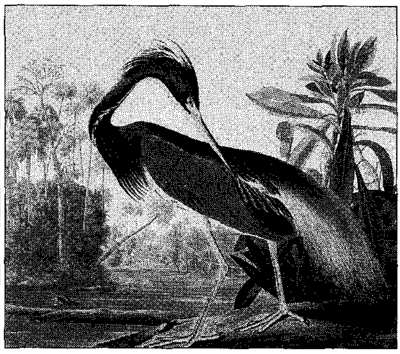

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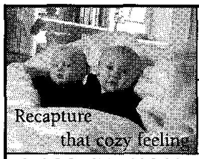

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RECIPES

SAPIDISSIMA

The most savory fish.

BY JOHN McPHEE

The roe that may go to the tickling of a single palate for one meal would be capable of development into thousands of lusty fishes that, even without a miracle, might feed the multitude.—*Dr. J. Ernest Scott, Bucks County Historical Society, 1908.*

Has it ever occurred to you, sir, when you eat one of a pair of fried shad-roes for breakfast, how many shad you consume in embryo? If the roe is from a good-sized fish, certainly not less than twenty-five thousand. O thou piscivorous Leviathan! thou has devoured in germ, at a single meal, and merely as a relish to thy coffee, a hundred thousand pounds of fish.—*Thaddeus Norris, known among anglers as Uncle Thad; Lippincott's Magazine, 1869.*

Keeping a single female may mean reducing the spawn by a half-million eggs! Fried shad roe is delicious, but nothing tastes *that* good. —*Robert Elman, Fly Fishing Quarterly, 1992.*

I have a suggestion for Dr. Scott, Mr. Elman, and Uncle Thad. Don't fry it. If you like shad roe, it does help, yes, to have a cast-iron skillet with a tight-fitting glass lid, but don't exactly fry the roe. Before going further, I should declare that this account is not intended as a survey of shad cookery or an extensive collection of shad recipes. First, I want to describe how I cook shad roe, then milt, then fillets boned and unboned, then whole shad. I will put all the personal experience up front and then gradually work in some things that others do. My way of cooking roe I learned from another fisherman many years ago, and I promptly stopped sautéing it in the conventional manner.

SHAD ROE

Cover the bottom of the cast-iron skillet with bacon, thick-sliced if you want to go sooner. Snip the bacon to fit. One contiguous layer will do. There's no need to separate the sacs at this point; they look nice in their bilateral symmetry. Place them vein side up or vein side down—cosmetically and otherwise, it doesn't matter. You can cook two or more sets of roe sacs side by side if your skillet is large enough. The ones I use are nine inches across the top and seven inches across the base, with glass lids. Salt and pepper the roe sacs. Cover the pan. Put it on the burner at medium heat, and do not go away. Do not answer the telephone. Exile wives, children, and even grandchildren—out!—for a couple of minutes while you listen. After the bacon begins to sizzle, turn down the heat to the lowest level you are able to achieve without turning the burner off. Shad roe can explode if steam inside it builds up too rapidly. As a preventive measure, books have recommended pricking the roe before you cook it, as if it were a baking potato—a method I have not found notably effective. What you want to hear is a low, regular, consistent sizzle—not the sound of bacon rapidly crisping. If your lowest heat level is too vigorous, slip a wire spacer or heat diffuser under the pan, or some other device to hobble the burner.

Now set your timer for thirty-five minutes. Relax your injunctions on your family. Don't stray too far, though. Go back every five minutes to listen—to be sure that the sizzling is neither too active nor extinct. The checkup is entirely aural. You'll see nothing through the lid but dense fog. This method is an attenuated hybrid of sautéing and steaming. The bacon becomes watery and the roe gradually tightens up in steam. Cook it until it is quite firm. Thirty-five minutes should do it, less if the roe sacs are small. The ideal result, in cross-section, is wet in the middle with an aureole of drier eggs. With a couple of minutes to go, put on your oven mitts, take hold of the lid handle and the pan handle, and pour off the accumulated water and bacon melt into the kitchen garbage wadded with paper towels. Employ the lid to prevent the roe from falling out of the skillet. Put the pan back on the stove, uncovered, and turn the heat back up to medium, so the bacon can brown. Just pray there's no explosion. If one occurs at

RUVEN AFANADOR

this point, though, it will probably be a small one, and the damage will be minor.

At the end of the thirty-five minutes, gingerly feel around with a small spatula and free up any bacon that is sticking to the pan. Jiggle things a little and make sure that the roe and bacon will slide, but don't attempt with the spatula to turn anything over. Cover the skillet with an upside-down serving plate. With one hand on the pan handle and the other spread flat on the bottom of the plate, flip the skillet. Set the skillet aside. On the serving plate the finished roe is concealed beneath a thatch of bacon, beautifully hued by carbon fixing, its circular dimensions framed by the edge of the plate.

The bacon may be undercooked. Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes it is. I have no idea why. This is not a perfect world. If the bacon is undercooked—or, more likely, undercooked here and there—remove the offending strips, finish them off in the skillet (or the microwave), and repair the thatch. Seen out in the light, the cooked roe is cosmetically disadvantaged, in that the veins are evident and there has been no browning. In my view, it is a mistake to try to brown the roe purely for aesthetic reasons. The dish is quite attractive with its roof of bacon.

Chop the ends off a lemon, render it hexapartite, and sit down. That's all the sauce you need, and—in my house—is all you are going to get. You have your shad roe. You are in business!

MILT

In "The Market Assistant, Containing a Brief Description of Every Article of Human Food Sold in the Public Markets of the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn" (1867), Thomas De Voe reported that not a few people prefer shad milt to shad roe. On some days, I'm one of those people. The milt of the buck shad—in its firm pink pods—sketches the same bilateral outline as shad roe, but is thin and lies flat. The milt within has the consistency of heavy cream and is as white as the whitest quartz. The matrix is water. The sperm cells are white and opaque. But all that is invisible, being well sealed in its encasing membrane. Salt and pepper the pods. Shake flour over them, lightly. Sauté them in butter and oil. Pan-fry them as if they were eggs. Place them on soft variable toast—white, whole wheat, sourdough, Russian rye. This dish bestows status on the buck shad. It is reminiscent of the marrow in osso buco. The word for it is not semen but savory. The taxonomic name of this fish is *Alosa sapidissima*. "Sapidissima" means "most savory." In England, herring milt on toast is served at the end of dinner as a savoury. American shad semen, after all, is herring milt. On toast, with squeezed lemon, it is melting with freshness. If you had your choice between shad semen and a pink-icinged Pop-Tart, which would you take? Which would you take among a shad's semen, a calf's brain, a chicken's liver, and the inside of an ox femur? You just can't sit there eating Ferdinand's tongue and talk that way about shad milt, so cut it out.

UNBONED FILLETS

Lay out the fillet, slice away the ribs, sprinkle with lemon pepper (Lawry's, if you can find it), and broil, about nine inches below the heat. If shad fillets are put in a broiler very soon after swimming, they will rise like bread as they brown. As shad muscle broils, it will soften before it sets. After eleven or twelve minutes, it will almost be soup. At fifteen and a half minutes, it is firm and just done. Past sixteen, it is overdone. The window is that narrow. Moreover, the window moves around from stove to stove, because stoves are idiosyncratic. So if fifteen and a half minutes is not your windowsill, better luck next

Shad cooks in its own nutty butter—the fat it lives on during the spawning run.

"They're all made from soy."

• •

time. Add or subtract thirty seconds until you find it.

•

> The meat itself is easily on a par with pompano. It's moist and succulent; very pale, almost white after cooking. The meat is so exquisitely delicate you must force yourself not to overcook it.—*Russell Chatham, Fly Fisherman, 1979.*

When the fillet is on a plate and you have lots of fresh lemon to squeeze on it, sit down under a bright light. Slide a fork into the meat, and lift. In many places, you can raise a boneless forkful. When intermuscular bones come up with the flesh, they protrude glistening, and—pinched between thumb and forefinger—will easily slip away. Don't try to be thorough. Take what you can conveniently get. You will not be lonely, even if you are alone. Eating unboned shad requires so much concentration it's as if you were eating with someone else. And you can do it with great pleasure. Never mind the nineteenth-century Pennsylvania doctor mentioned in Richard Gerstell's "American Shad in the Susquehanna River Basin" who "recommended against eating shad because of the difficulty of removing their bones from children's throats." He may have been a lazy doctor.

A shad-bone anthology would fill a thick volume. "The champion place for getting up an appetite for shad is at a Brooklyn boarding-house," said the anonymous, nineteenth-century author of "A Dissertation on Shad." A boarder, having been told that dinner will be shad, arrives at table wearing "the poorest shirt he has" and carrying a magnifying glass, a bone basket, a toothpick, and tweezers.

> He will get so full of the bony parts that he will sigh for a little more Bourbon. When he swallows a bone, all he has to do is to take his tweezers and pull it out. . . . It is calculated that during the shad season a good shad-eater will get from ten to fifteen bushels of bones from what shad he eats. After the last shad is destroyed, he tears off his shirt, sandpapers off the ends of the bones which are sticking out through his skin, dons clean linen, and is himself again.

"The shad-bone season for thumping people on the back is almost here," said the Columbia, Pennsylvania, *Spy* in the spring of 1880. (Dr. Heimlich may have had shad in mind when he invented his maneuver.) A visitor to Jamestown wrote in 1612 that American rivers had "shaddes, great store, of a yard long, and for sweetnes and fatnes a reasonable good fish, he is only full of small bones, like our barbells in England." Nearly four centuries later, Ruth Spear, writing in the New York *Post*, described American shad as "gastronomically the finest of all white fish but with a maddening number of bones." So there is a certain consistency in writers' reports on this aspect of this fish, but for me the broiled unboned fillet remains the most appealing way to present a plate of shad. If you think you are eating a Norway spruce, pay closer attention. Avoid conversation. Are we eating or talking?

BONED FILLETS

Broil as above, and consume them with an arsenal of freshly wedged lemons. A shad has plenty of adipose tissue. It comes with its own nutty butter—the fat it is living on while eating nothing on the spawning run. That's why it is sapidissima. To a large extent it is self-seasoned. And it will baste itself. Amazingly, for such a fish, it can be successfully frozen, retaining most of its flavor. But eat it all up before Christmas. For variety, I sometimes spoon over the fillets a two-to-one mixture of soy sauce and sesame oil full of chopped scallions. I put it on before broiling and add a little toward the end. Sometimes I include lemon juice, and incorporate bits of fresh ginger instead of the scallions. You can decide whether the sesame-soy concoction deepens the taste or disguises it. It's good, surely, but the shad doesn't need it.

WHOLE BAKED SHAD

Ever since I learned how they cook whole shad in the Maritime Provinces of Canada, I have seldom done it another way. You make turkey stuffing, stuff the fish, bake it for thirty-five minutes at three hundred and fifty degrees, and eat it. Canadians told me to bake the shad with the scales on, but if I did that it would superalienate the person with whom I share the kitchen. If there is one thing in this world she detests, it's a shad scale. No one knows why. As far as

I can make out, she finds it inconvenient that they are nearly invisible and—in drains and drainpipes—can laminate themselves in a manner that could bankrupt Roto-Rooter. I therefore suggest that you remove the scales, and with them the head, tail, and fins. Salt and pepper the skin and the empty cavity. Pack it up with turkey stuffing until the filled gap between the belly flaps is something like two inches. During the thirty-five baking minutes, you don't need to roll the fish over. On a serving platter, cant it upward, more or less on its back, and open it as you would a trout. Choose your own instruments. I use two fish servers—or two small spatulas. (When Germans eat whole fish, they use two forks.) At any rate, you cause the shad to split open, and the sides to lie down symmetrically on the platter. Then you lift away the backbone and ribs. The white muscle shines like polished marble and is very moist and tender. A man in Doaktown, on the Miramichi River, in New Brunswick, told me not to eat it with a knife and fork, calling it "finger food." Suit yourself. I eat it with a fork in one hand and a wedge of lemon in the other. The stuffing, meanwhile, has been enhanced by the nutty essence of American shad.

When I asked James Webb—in Upper Economy, Nova Scotia, on the Bay of Fundy—if his family likes to eat the shad he traps in his brush weir, he said, "There's a lot of shad ate around here. They're very bony, but boy they're some sweet fish." The Webbs fry, bake, and barbecue shad. He said they bake whole shad thirty minutes at three hundred with a stuffing of potato, onion, and summer savory. "Eat them with pepper, salt, and vinegar. Fried: Cut them in one-inch steaks, but first wipe the fish dry. There should be no fresh water on fish. It takes the taste away. Roll the steaks in cornmeal or flour. Fry them in some oil—not too much. Barbecue: Wrap them in tinfoil with thin-sliced onion on it. Jab holes in the tinfoil to let the fat run out. Cook for roughly twenty minutes on a grate over hot coals."

Following a recipe in A. J. McClane's "Encyclopedia of Fish Cookery," I once steamed a buck shad—the whole fish minus scales, head, fins, and tail—for five hours on the elevated rack of a fish poacher. Although I am not much tempted to do it again, the method worked. The flesh remained firm and flavorsome, although scarcely with the taste of a fresh-broiled shad. The backbone was slightly crunchy but edible. The small intermuscular bones melted in the mouth. The recipe described a caper sauce. It was too rich. Try another sauce.

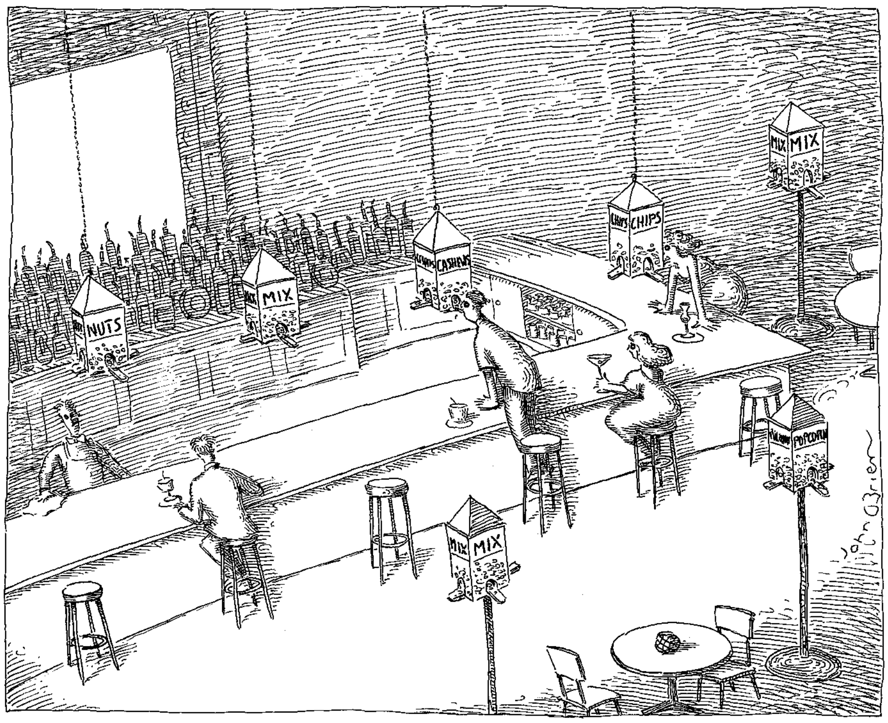
The purpose of long cooking is to defeat the bones without ripping up the fish to get them out. Defeat equals dissolve. The large bones soften to the point of edibility, and the myriad small bones simply disappear.

Marilyn Yates, whom I've known since high school, bakes whole shad at two hundred and fifty degrees for seven hours, as her mother did. Marilyn has never cooked shad another way. She begins with a spotlessly cleaned fish—unsplit, and without scales, head, or fins. She continues: "Season it with salt and pepper, lay three or four strips of bacon on it, place it in one cup of water, and surround it with sliced onion and sliced lemon. Cover it tightly with foil or the top of the pan. Check every two and a half hours to see if the water level is O.K. If not, add a little more. Good eating!"

Sooner or later, almost anybody will, at least once, try the bone war's ultimate weapon. You can nuke a shad with a pressure cooker. I did it for the first time a decade ago, and plan to do it a second time some year soon. I put inch-thick slices in the pressure cooker with onions and celery, and timed the hiss (at fifteen pounds) for a half hour. After the fish cooled, I peeled off the skin, removed the backbone, and refrigerated the rest. It was served cold under a mayonnaise thinned with lemon juice and thickened with chopped fresh dill. The intermuscular bones and even the ribs had disappeared.

As an alternative to the dill mayonnaise, my fishing pal Alan Lieb has suggested gooseberries cooked the same way you cook rhubarb—in a small amount of water with sugar. "In June, when gooseberries are available, you could make a purée and freeze it," he said. "It's a wonderful counterpoint to the richness of the fish." Also, he mentioned a green-peppercorn sauce—"crushed peppercorns in a meat glaze, with a little vinegar in it to bring it all to life."

Armand Charest, the master dart-maker of the Connecticut River, has an alternative to the gooseberries and the green peppercorns. Armand Charest: "You take a shad. You put it in a pressure cooker with a brick. You cook it for eight hours. Then you throw away the shad and eat the brick." ♦



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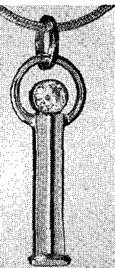

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EVERYONE LIES

Making the rounds with restaurant inspectors.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

People often ask Esmond Anderson where he goes to eat. The truth is he rarely eats out. During seven and a half years as a restaurant inspector with the New York City Department of Health, Anderson scrutinized some two thousand commercial kitchens. Five years ago, he started teaching at the city's Health Academy, in the basement of a clinic on West 100th Street. His classroom is decorated with posters detailing, in Spanish and in English, the risks posed by dented cans, leaky vacuum-sealed packages, and careless thawing. One chronicles an outbreak of botulism traced to "killer potatoes." Anderson, who is fifty-three years old, is a trim man with very little hair and an almost imperceptible gray mustache. He speaks in the accent of his native Guyana, and manages to convey a respect for the gravity of his task and, at the same time, an appreciation of its futility. He likes to tell his students—pushcart venders, sous-chefs, restaurant managers, bartenders, and short-order cooks—that he thinks of them all as potential murderers.

"The things that you're going to learn, some of them are going to shock you," he informed his class one recent afternoon. "You might say, 'I never knew this! How is it I've been preparing food and serving it all this time and no one ever died?' As a matter of fact, how do you *know* that your customers have never died? If they died, they don't come back to you to complain."

Anderson's weeklong course costs a hundred and five dollars. It consists of five three-hour sessions and ends in an exam that is offered in twenty languages. The take-home quizzes have questions like "People, both food workers and customers, pose the greatest risk to food safety. True or False?" and "List three situations when hands must be washed thoroughly." The week I attended, I sat in the back row. On my right was a woman from Queens who managed a Blimpie; she had already had, she acknowledged to the group, an unhappy encounter with a city health inspector. On my left was a man who operated a fleet of ice-cream trucks in the Bronx. (When I suggested that this ought to be pretty safe, he countered that, on the contrary, ice cream was a "bacteria magnet.") At a later session, one of my neighbors was a Russian man who used to work at a hair salon near the World Trade Center but was planning to get into shish kebab. He took copious notes on tiny sheets of paper, and enthusiastically yelled out the answers to all of Anderson's questions. ("Vayrmin!" he declared, more or less correctly, in response to one of them.) In front of us, a man in an Auburn University baseball cap spent most of the class bent over his desk, asleep.

"Anybody glad to be here?" Anderson asked at the start of the course. A solitary hand went up. "That's a nice general consensus," he observed.

By law, every "food service establishment" in New York City must have on duty at all times at least one worker with a course certificate from the Health Academy. The explicit purpose of the class is to address the many technical hazards of meal preparation. Among the topics it covers are the life cycle of microörganisms, the sources of cross-contamination, and the best ways to prevent foodborne illnesses, from listeriosis and shigellosis to staphylococcal food intoxication and scombroid poisoning. "After today, anytime you see poultry or eggs, this is what should come to your mind: salmonella," Anderson announced midway through the first class.

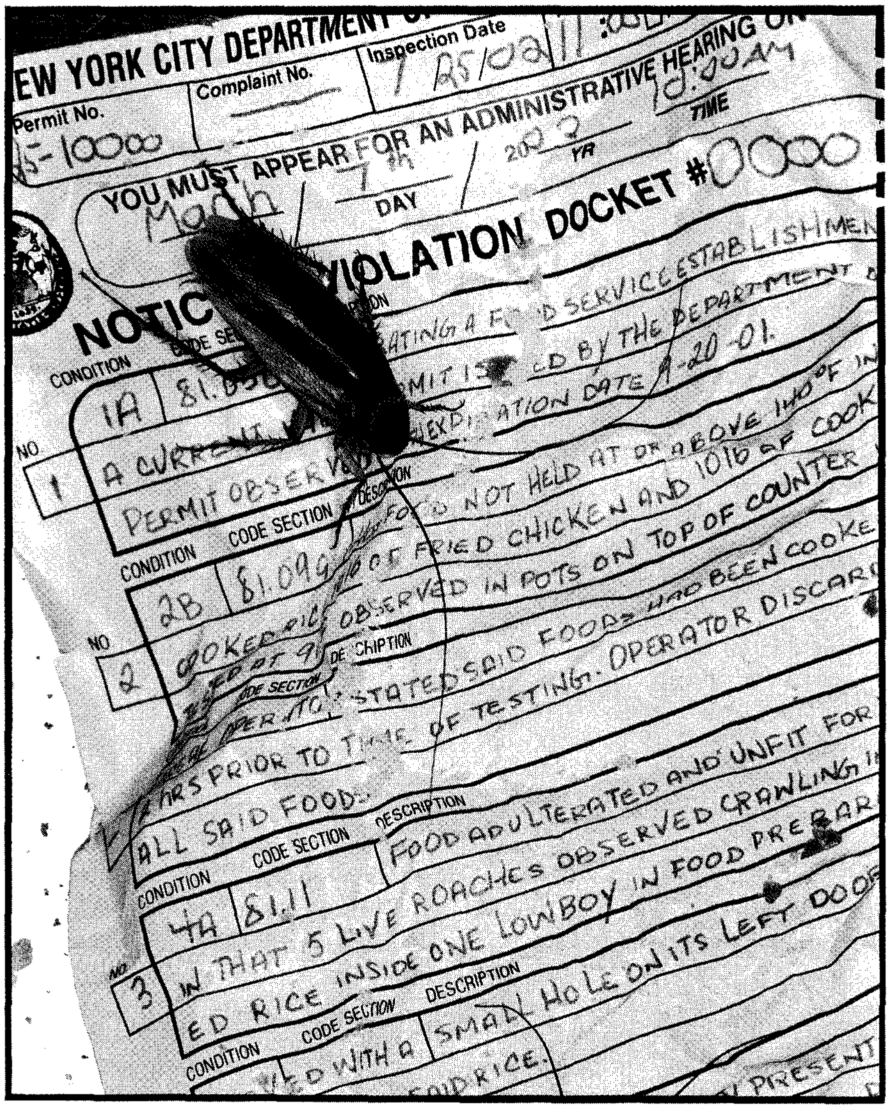
The real subject of Anderson's curriculum, however, is not so much bacteriological as moral: how do you persuade someone to care about food that someone else is going to eat? In principle, New York City's health code regulates everything from the minimum allowable cooking time for roast beef to the proper procedure for dealing with drinking straws. In reality, of course, dining out in the city is an act of faith that could be described as taking your life on your fork. The city does not keep statistics on the number of cases of foodborne illness contracted in restaurants; since most victims never go to a hospital, or even to a doctor, such a figure would be impossible to obtain, but almost certainly it is a large one. Eleven years ago, for example, a worker with hepatitis A at a corporate cafeteria in lower Manhattan managed to pass on the disease to sixty people. New York City, which has an estimated twenty thousand restaurants, employs just sixty-six "public health sanitarians," who spend a quarter of their time on tasks like checking for window guards on apartment buildings and testing chlorine levels at public pools.

At one point, Anderson posed the following hypothetical question to the class: "It's lunchtime, and you've got a big pot of chili on the countertop that you're supposed to serve for your lunch special. You have it open and up comes a fly zooming in, kamikaze style, and it lands in this pot of chili. What do you do? Ladle him out and then continue serving? How many of you would dump the whole pot?"

"Oh, boy, wow," he said, as the class started guffawing. "We've got some honest people here."

One morning not long after I visited the Health Academy, I arranged to meet Nicolle Woods and Bryant Washington in Greenwich Village. Woods, who is thirty-three, is an attractive woman with almond-shaped eyes and a friendly, no-nonsense manner. She has been a restaurant inspector since 1998, and was recently promoted by the Health Department to the position of senior sanitarian. Washington, who is twenty-eight but looks about eighteen, has also worked as a restaurant inspector for the past four years. In his spare time, he sings tenor in a doo-wop band. Their first stop of the day was a diner where, as it happened, I had eaten several times. Woods and Washington flashed their badges, and before they had a chance to pull out their pads half the staff had disappeared. I saw this reaction—mice scurrying before the approaching cat—at every restaurant we visited.

The inspectors began with the dining room. The fruit salad in the dessert case was covered, and the pastries laid out on the counter were individually wrapped, obviating the need for a "sneeze guard." The ice-cream freezer was clean. There was no thermometer in the refrigerator underneath the counter, but when Woods took the temperature of a quart of milk with a metal probe it was cold enough to satisfy her. The necessary permits, including the owner's food-protection certificate, were posted by the door, next to a sign advertising the availability of a C.P.R. mask.


EW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT
Permit No. 5-10000
Complaint No.
Inspection Date 7/25/02 11:00
YOU MUST APPEAR FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING ON
March 7th DAY 2002 YR 10:00AM TIME
VIOLATION DOCKET #00000
NOTIC
CONDITION 1A CODE SE 81.05
NO 1
ATING A FO D SERVICE ESTABLISHMEN
MIT IS D BY THE DEPARTMENT
A CURR EXPI ATION DATE 4-20-01.
PERMIT OBSERVED
CONDITION 2B CODE SECTION 81.09
DESCRIPTION FOOD NOT HELD AT OR ABOVE 140°F IN
OF FRIED CHICKEN AND 1016 OF COOK
COOKED RICE OBSERVED IN POTS ON TOP OF COUNTER
NO 2 KEPT AT 91
DESCRIPTION OPER STATED SAID FOODS HAD BEEN COOKE
HRS PRIOR TO TIME OF TESTING. OPERATOR DISCAR
ALL SAID FOOD.
CONDITION 4A CODE SECTION 81.11
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IN THAT 5 LIVE ROACHES OBSERVED CRAWLING IN
NO 3
ED RICE INSIDE ONE LOWBOY IN FOOD PREPAR
CONDITION CODE SECTION
D WITH A
DESCRIPTION SMALL HOLE ON ITS LEFT DOOR
SAID RICE.
PRESENT

How do you persuade people to care about food that someone else is going to eat?

RUVEN AFANADOR

The inspectors headed into the kitchen. Among the disappeared was the cook, and several vats of soup were boiling away unattended. Nearby, sandwich fixings were piled on a cooling unit called a lowboy. Woods stuck her metal probe into a mound of tuna salad. The reading was fifty-five degrees, ten degrees above the legal limit. She summoned the owner, a slight man with a pompadour. He wore the sickly, stricken smile of the damned.

"See the temperature?" Woods asked him, passing him the bin of tuna fish. "What temperature should it be?"

He hesitated. "Why it is fifty-five?" he finally asked, in a tone of exaggerated surprise.

"I don't know why," Woods replied. "But it's garbage now." She repeated this process remorselessly with a pile of sliced ham (fifty-five degrees), a container of cut-up chicken (also fifty-five), and a tray of raw eggs (sixty-two). The eggs, she concluded, had been left out on the counter and only shoved into the lowboy after we arrived.

From this point on, things began to deteriorate rapidly. The kitchen sky-light, coated with bird droppings, was broken. Inside the walk-in refrigerator, stacks of raw hamburger patties were dripping their juices into pans of precooked noodles. Downstairs, in the storage room, blocks of mouse poison were lying around uncovered. A fly was swimming, or perhaps just floating, in a large pan of raw chickens. Several cans had dents in them, including a container of cranberry sauce that looked as if it had been run over. The owner rushed to rearrange the cans, pushing the defective ones off to the side. "Always I give them back," he said. Finally, the cook appeared. He was wearing a spattered apron and ostentatiously pulling on a pair of disposable latex gloves. Just then, Washington yanked a toilet seat out from next to the refrigerator.

"It broke last night," the cook wailed, by way of explanation. He rolled his eyes. "My luck today," he said.

The inspection lasted about half an hour. After it was done, Woods and Washington sat down at a banquette in the back to fill out the requisite paperwork. Violations of the health code fall into two categories—Class A, or "critical," and Class B, C, and D, which are "general." (Each instance of a critical violation is counted separately; general violations are grouped more leniently.) It takes either four criticals or five generals to fail an inspection.

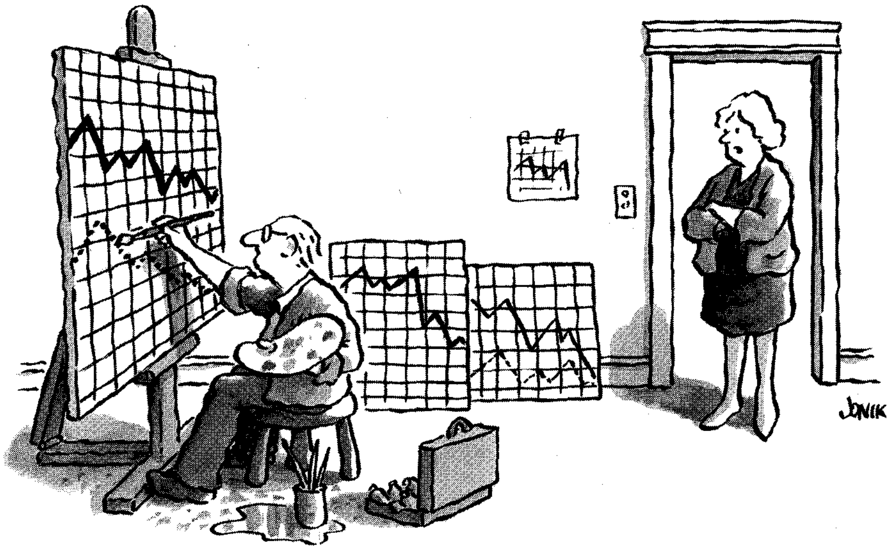
With six critical violations and six general, the diner had, in effect, flunked twice. Woods, who has tiny, astonishingly neat handwriting, filled four pages with descriptions of its many shortcomings. Washington, meanwhile, went to make sure that the condemned food had been disposed of. He found the chickens still in their pan with the dead fly. He had the owner throw them out and, for good measure, pour bleach over them. Without this extra precaution, he told me, the chickens probably would have wound up under gravy. "As soon as we go, they'll be dragging stuff out of the garbage," he said. When their paperwork was complete, Woods and Washington summoned the owner to the banquette.

"I call already the refrigerator man," he said.

"What temperature should your cold food be at?" Woods asked.

"Under the forty-five."

At the very least, the inspection was going to result in several hundred dollars' worth of fines—the precise figure would be assessed by an administrative tribunal—and, at worst, it had set in motion a process that could eventually close the diner down. The city tries to inspect every restaurant once a year; last year, it performed some eighteen thousand inspections and failed about two thousand five hundred establishments on the first round. Restaurants that fail one inspection are given a second, and often a third, chance, and those that still fail are padlocked. In the twelve-month period that ended in June, three hundred and seventy-eight establishments were shut down by the Health Department.



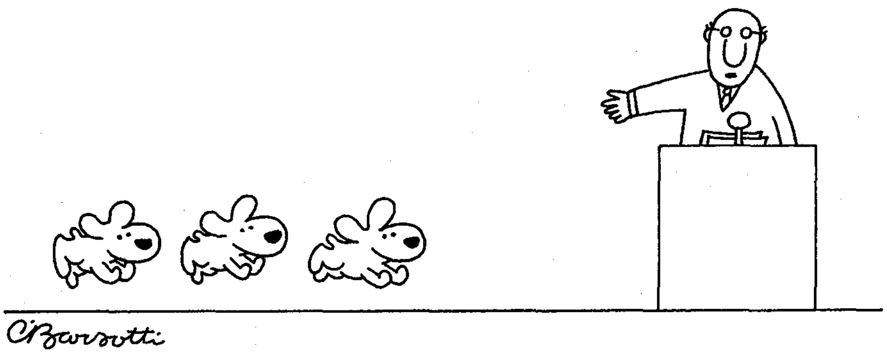
"For heaven's sake! You're retired. Give it up!"

Sitting next to the owner on the banquette, I suddenly felt depressed, though whether this was out of sympathy for him, exactly, I wasn't sure. I tried not to think about the chickens slowly blanching in the basement. The cook wandered over. He shook our hands, still wearing his latex gloves. It seemed to me unlikely that he would put on a new pair before returning to his lunch preparations—another health-code violation. "Don't work so hard," he said.

The next stop was a Chinese place, also in Greenwich Village, where illuminated photographs of elaborate dishes hung above the counter. Woods charged in, explaining to me over her shoulder, "In Chinese restaurants, you have to move at the speed of light." Still, she wasn't fast enough. The chef, who also seemed to be the owner—this issue was never resolved to the inspectors' satisfaction—saw her coming and immediately pulled a five-gallon vat of fried rice off a shelf and dumped the entire contents into a steaming wok. Whether the rice had been "out of temperature" was now impossible to determine, and that was almost certainly the point.

The inspection turned up mouse droppings under the counter, among the plastic utensils, and, somewhat more mysteriously, in the freezer—a critical violation. In the basement, Washington discovered raw and cooked food heaped together—a general violation—and cleavers stuck behind sewage pipes that were being used as a makeshift knife rack, also a general violation. I found it hard to keep track of how things were going because I spent most of the inspection trying not to be scalded by the pots of oil boiling on the stove while avoiding the hole in the floor that served as the entrance to the basement. Ultimately, the place failed, but it scored better than the diner, with a total of two critical and five general violations.

City health-department officials are reluctant to generalize about what sort of food-service establishments tend to be the least hygienic. One day, I raised this question over lunch with the director of the Bureau of Food Safety and Community Sanitation, Robert Edman. I had invited him to Bouley, the res-



"But, first, a distraction."

• •

taurant with a four-star chef, now situated on West Broadway. "Mom-and-pop restaurants might have a very limited menu," he said. "Your fancy restaurants have a much more elaborate menu. By the laws of probability, more can go wrong here than can go wrong there." Edman told me that he thought that Bouley was well run, having recently seen its inspection report. Still, just by sitting in the dining room he noted one possible general violation—he could not see a poster showing how to perform the Heimlich maneuver—and one potential critical one: the menu advertised an entrée containing "wild mushrooms," which, if actually wild, are illegal. "Everybody claims to be a mushroom expert," he observed dryly. "But every year an expert dies."

The day I went out with the inspectors, we had lunch at Benny's Burritos, on Greenwich Avenue, which was chosen mostly on the ground that neither Woods nor Washington had ever been inside the kitchen. Woods volunteered that she had sworn off Chinatown, noting that "any sane New Yorker wouldn't eat there," while Washington said he could no longer eat from pushcarts: once, inspecting a vender commissary in midtown, he had seen something revolting involving cat feces and a large open bin of pretzel salt. Washington also recalled an Indian restaurant in the East Village whose sewage pipes had backed up in the basement, driving the rats upstairs. (The restaurant had continued to use the flooded basement for storage, and all the workers tramped around in rubber boots.)

As we finished our burritos, I asked the two what they had learned from their years on the job. Without hesitating, Woods said, "Everyone lies." She still seemed saddened by this revelation. Referring to a Hebrew day school where she had recently inspected the cafeteria, she added, "The rabbi is lying." Great cooks are said to be naturally generous; it occurred to me that to be a restaurant inspector it probably helps to be a born misanthrope.

The last stop of the day was a funky, vaguely pan-Asian restaurant. It was two-thirty in the afternoon, but a few stray diners were still lingering over lunch. Woods pulled on her Department of Health jacket, and the usual vanishing act ensued. The only person left in the kitchen was the cook, who was frying something that looked like tofu. A bowl of hard-boiled eggs was sitting on the counter.

"Garbage," Woods announced.

"Garbage?" the cook said. "No problem." Woods asked to see a food-protection certificate, and a certificate issued to the owner was produced. The cook said that the owner typically arrived at the restaurant around three o'clock. Woods was about to register a critical violation—no certificate holder on the premises—when the owner suddenly appeared. He was wearing a red baseball cap and carrying a copy of the *Post* under his arm. He insisted that he had been there all along but, overcome by an urge to read about J. Lo and Ralph Fiennes, had just stepped out to buy the paper. Woods made it clear that she didn't believe a word of this, then nevertheless struck the violation.

We headed downstairs. Four or five workers were cleaning furiously, sweeping up and moving boxes. The freezer checked out satisfactorily, as did the dishwasher. Woods asked to see the thermometer that the restaurant used to monitor food temperature, but none of the workers could come up with one. Meanwhile, Washington noticed an infestation of flies in the basement.

Back upstairs, Woods and Washington sat down in the dining room to fill out their report. As they were writing, a young man, smiling sheepishly and clutching his shirt, walked into the restaurant. Woods and Washington exchanged looks. After a few minutes, another young man emerged from the back, waving a thermometer. Woods examined it.

"Where'd you buy that from?" she asked the owner.

"I had it," he said, as if wounded by her skepticism. He sat down at the table and watched as the inspectors continued to write. He was wearing flip-flops, which he kept clicking against his soles. Finally, Woods and Washington handed him their report. The restaurant had two critical violations—the warm eggs and the fly infestation—and three general ones, meaning that it had passed. The owner was still facing fines, but he was relieved enough to start joking. He said he already had a plan to get the fines reduced. "I go in and cry," he said cheerfully.

Woods and Washington began to pack up their things. It had been a long day, and, from a public-health standpoint, not a particularly encouraging one: they had issued twenty-four violations. On the other hand, they had made it through three inspections without being physically threatened, or even verbally abused. (Washington told me that an irate restaurateur had once hurled a bug zapper at his head.) Around us, a handful of diners were still finishing lunch. They must have suspected what was going on but continued to chat, to argue, and to eat. I had noticed this pattern at the diner, and also at the Chinese place, where customers had kept right on ordering despite the commotion. Perhaps they were confident enough in the food they were being served not to worry, or perhaps—and this seems more likely—they just didn't want to know. ♦

NEW YORK JOURNAL

THE COOKING GAME

Six chefs, nine ingredients, seven days.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

I enjoy the company of cooks. I admire them because they are hard workers, and because they make delicious things. But, more than that, I like to contemplate the way they have to think in order to make the things they make. They are the last artists among us who still live in the daily presence of patronage. In the two centuries since the Romantic revolution, the arts have, one by one, been Byronized, set free from the necessity of pleasing an audience—a process that began with the poets and painters and took in the architects and novelists and has swept up, most recently, the rock musicians and shoe designers. All have taught themselves that they are there to instruct and puzzle an audience, not to please it.

But although cooks are a source of romance, they are not themselves Romantic. They practice their art the way all art was practiced until the nineteenth century, as a job done to order for rich people who treat you as something between the court jester and the butler. Cooks can be temperamental—cooks are *supposed* to be temperamental—but temperament is the Byronism of the dependent; children, courtesans, and cooks all have it. What cooks have in place of freedom is what all artists had back before they were released from the condition of flunkydom: a weary, careful dignity, a secretive sense of craft, and the comforting knowledge of belonging to a guild.

I also enjoy the company of cooks because I have always wanted to be one. A surprising number of writers I know, apart from the bitter ones who dream about being publishers, share this fantasy. Words and food are bound together in some inexplicable way, a peculiar communion that lends grace and mystery to what otherwise would seem to be a simple exchange of gluttony for publicity.

Overt collaborations between writers and cooks, however, are rare, and I was therefore happy and surprised last March when two cooks whose company I enjoy a lot asked if I would, so to speak, write them a meal. The two cooks were Dan Barber, of Blue Hill, in Greenwich Village, and Peter Hoffman, of Savoy, in SoHo. It was Peter who called me first, and asked if I would be interested in organizing a *jeu de cuisine*, a cooking game. The game, he said, had been invented by Robert Courtine, who, under the name of La Reynière, was the gastronomic columnist of *Le Monde* for many years. (He had been a full-fledged collaborator with Vichy during the war; afterward, he became a reactionary of the table, and flourished.) In the early seventies, when nouvelle cuisine was just appearing, Courtine chose a list of ingredients from the Paris markets, and then had five cooks prepare a menu from them. Peter told me that five young New York chefs had agreed to cook for a week from a list of ingredients of my choosing from the farmers' market in Union Square. The cooks would use the foods I chose in whatever way they wanted, with whatever else they wanted to add. (It wouldn't be a competition, he said, in the tone in which extremely competitive people say those words.) I agreed, of course, although I later explained to him and Dan Barber that they would have to be responsible for my education: I had to confess that I had never visited the green market. They seemed unsurprised by this information; whatever they were coming to me for, it wasn't expertise.

I have known Peter since 1990, when he opened Savoy, a lovely, neighborly restaurant, with a golden-lit Arts and Crafts-style room, all blond wood and copper mesh and candlelight and welcome, eclectic food. Dan Barber was a more recent friend. A year ago, I wandered into Blue Hill, which he oversees

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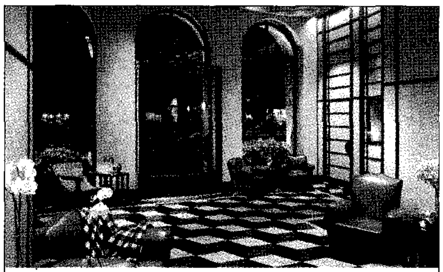

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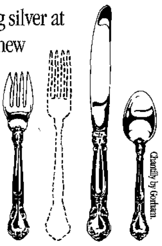
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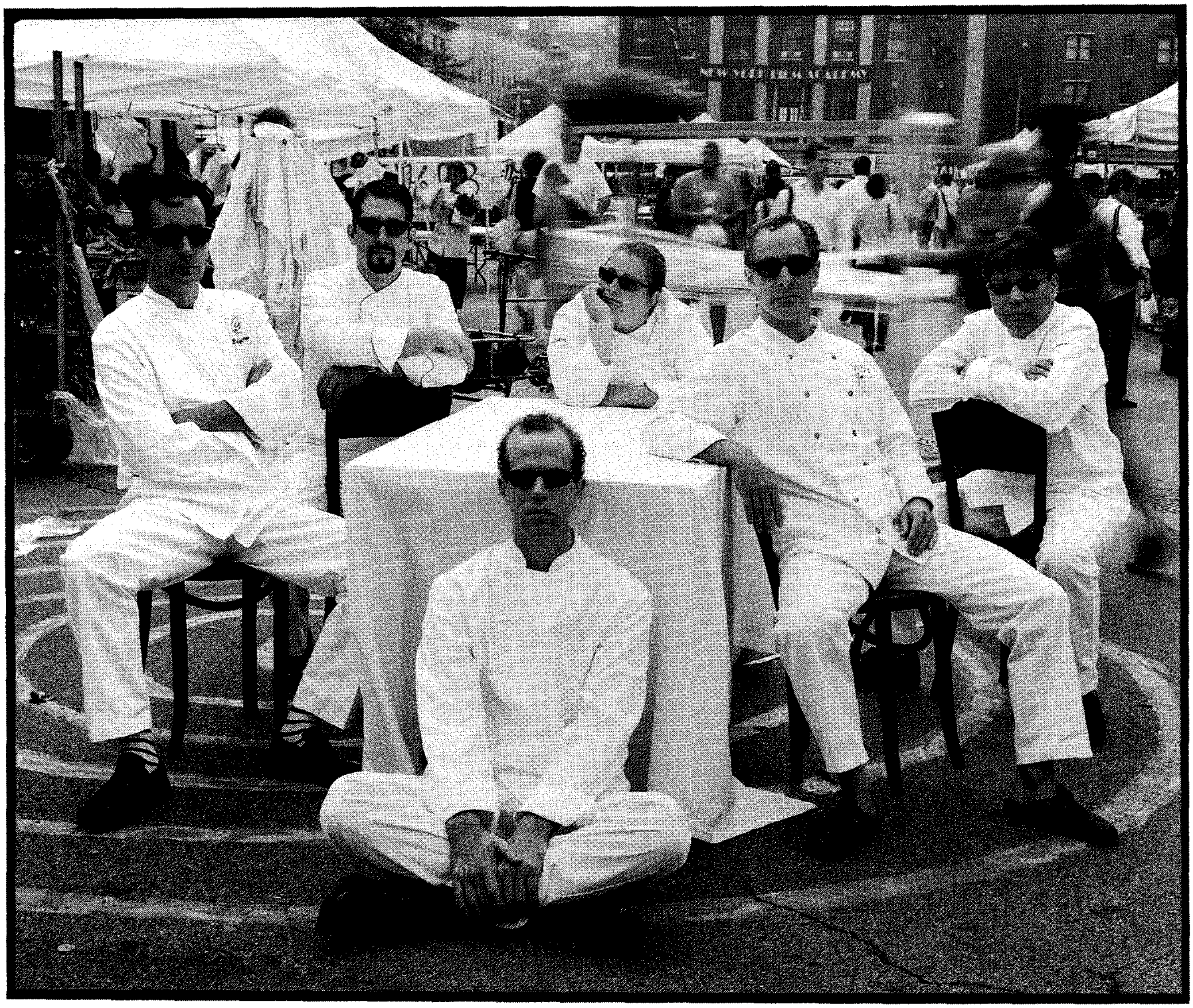

In Union Square, from left: Philippe Bertineau, Mike Anthony, Dan Barber, Sara Jenkins, Peter Hoffman, and Romy Dorotan.

RUVEN AFANADOR

with his fellow-chef Mike Anthony, expecting the kind of well-meaning meal you get from a young guy who has cooked for a couple of years in France, and instead ate as good a meal as any I have had outside the three-star places in Paris. Describing food is difficult, not because we can't capture in words things that are sensual—we do fine with painting and pubic hair—but because memorable description depends on startling metaphors, and startling metaphors depend on a willingness to be startled. Nobody did much with landscape, either, until it suddenly became respectable to compare a Swiss mountain to the whole of human destiny. We don't allow that freedom when it comes to what's on our plates. If someone wrote, for instance, that Dan Barber's foie gras with ground coffee beans is at once as inevitable as a tide and as astonishing as a wave, the reader's first response would be to think, quite rightly, that it is not, at all. (And yet it is.) People used to feel this way about metaphors for sex—the English still do. They have just got over Evelyn Waugh writing "I was made free of her narrow loins." But we all still resist "I was made free of his thick loin chops."

Dan is not merely an aspirant to intellect but a real live émigré from academe. In 1991, he had been waiting to go to China on a Fulbright in political science when his grant program was cancelled, and he set off instead to a job at a bakery. "Dan has this whole right-brain, left-brain thing going, which is rare for one of us," another cook said. There was something almost Salingeresque about him. He grew up on the Upper East Side—a Dalton lifer, kindergarten through high school; he cooked for his father after his mother died—and the way he generally looks and talks (acerbic, observant, self-critical), added to the natural diffidence of chefs, puts one in mind of the way Zooey Glass would have, had he chosen cooking over acting.

The three other chefs were to be Philippe Bertineau, of Payard Pâtisserie & Bistro, on the Upper East Side; Sara Jenkins, of Patio Dining, in the East Village; and Romy Dorotan, of Cendrillon, in SoHo—one French cook, three Americans, and a Filipino. All of them did most of the shopping for their kitchens at the farmers' market in Union Square, and all of them were, directly or indirectly, sons and daughters of Alice Waters, the Jeanne d'Arc of Chez Panisse, in Berkeley, who brought to America the Doctrine of the seasonal, the organic, and the sincere. The doctrine includes the belief

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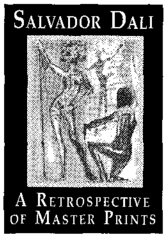

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that all shopping, if humanly possible, should be done at a farmers' market, that small producers are better than large, and that the cook should decide only after seeing what's in the market what he or she wants to cook that night.

When I got home and told my family that I had been specially selected as the point man for a demonstration of the virtues of the seasonal and the natural, of farmers' goods and nature's bounty, they were unimpressed.

"Will it be like Iron Chef?" my son, Luke, asked. He has become a great fan of the bizarre Japanese cooking competition that is broadcast on the Food Network every Friday night. On this program, two grim-faced chefs have an hour in which to cook a four-, five-, or even six-course meal, built around a single ingredient chosen by the host—a strange, melodramatic figure in black, who spits out Japanese. The special ingredient rises from beneath the floor, like the Phantom of the Opera's organ, in dark expressionist lighting.

"You'll be the guy in the black leather pants," he said, and barked "Tuna!" in a mock Japanese accent.

"No, I won't," I said. "This is not going to be a competition. Just an exhibition. Like the Dodo's race in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.' All must have prizes."

After years of Paris markets, with their abundance and bad faith—the Marché Biologique, the organic market on the Boulevard Raspail, sells a lot of terrific produce, but I have always doubted that pineapples are actually being grown organically on the Île-de-France—I confess that I found the pickings at the Union Square green market on a spring morning a little scrappy. The rules of the market insist that only a narrow band of local farmers can participate, and this limits your choices, especially between seasons.

"There's a lot of ramps and some good rhubarb" was the kind of cheering but not exactly inspiring summation you would hear on an April morning. "And some nice storage potatoes and some, uh, storage apples." (I didn't even know what ramps were, though I quickly learned: they are small wild leeks, which have suddenly become fashionable. Why this should be is hard to say, the appeal of a wild leek not being so great that it makes you regret that leeks were ever tamed.) In truth, the chefs, too, found the market disappointing on most mornings, and that, I realized, was exactly what appealed to them. Instead of ranging through the market like cooks in a television commercial—squeezing an apple, smelling a ramp, feeling up a chicken—they tended to go where they knew they wanted to go, seeing at a glance if what they were looking for was there, and then quietly taking as much of it as they could get. They didn't taste much, because experience with the vender and the look of the article told them what it would taste like. Expertise, I was reminded, isn't seeing all there is. Expertise is knowing what you're looking for.

And knowing what you're looking at. Peter could station himself in front of a fruit and give you twenty minutes on its pedigree and possibilities, like an Icelander telling you her family history. Once, we stopped in front of a crate of strawberries at the stall of Franca Tantillo, one of the more vivid farmers at the market. "These are the only good strawberries," he said. "Franca and the people at Fantasy Fruit are the only two people who are growing those strawberries right now. They're day-neutral, which means they completely ignore the usual Circadian cycle. They continue to flower even though the day is getting shorter." I tasted a couple. They were nothing like the familiar American Driscoll's strawberries—bright-red outsides and hard white mealy insides. Instead, they were sublime tiny berries with the fragrance of a French *fraise des bois*, perfumed and intensely sweet.

On another visit, we stopped at a table of desultory-looking green leaves—the kind of things you cut off the ends of leeks before you put them in a soup. It was a cold and rainy morning, and there didn't look like much that was worth taking the subway for.

"These are scapes," Peter said. "And to understand what they are, you gotta understand the truth about garlic. There are two major groupings of garlic: hard neck and soft neck." We were examining the hard neck. It looked like garlic with a leek stalk. "Hard-neck garlic grows a flower stalk that pulls energy away from the bulb. So you have to cut the flower off each plant, which takes forever, and only a handful of farmers are willing to do it—they cut off the flower stalks and we call them garlic scapes. Real hard-neck garlic came from Central Asia, and it requires a cold winter to get that juicy, full, pungent garlickness. We have a very Central Asian-, Afghanistan-garlic-type winter here." I tasted a scape. It had a sharp and intense garlic flavor, and a green, leafy undertone.

"You know, we have to put up with certain frustrations," Peter went on, as we tramped through the market. "But that's part of the whole expression. What produces great taste? One thing. *Stress*. French winemakers are always pushing the limit of viability. You can't really grow grapes in Champagne because it's too damn cold; and you can't really grow grapes in Châteauneuf-du-Pape because there's no soil there—but you force the vines to adapt to the environment and search for nutrients, and where the season is short enough and you have to crop close enough you get terrific flavor. What drives great taste in the field is stress."

"Thanks, Peter," Dan said dryly. "I'm going to tell that to everybody in the kitchen tonight."

One morning, as Dan and Peter and I walked around the market, I complained about how little meat was on offer. "Well, for the best veal you have to meet Amy, this woman upstate," Dan said. "You know, most veal is white, and it's sort of awful and immoral how they raise it, because they want white meat. But she has a dairy farm, and instead of getting rid of the male calves she just, well, she brings them up like her own children." Dan's eyes glowed. "They're grass-fed and she lets them run as free as you or I. It's a hard sell for a restaurant, because it's a reddish meat and customers expect white, but it's absolutely delicious and she's a completely admirable person. I mean, she's amazing, the way she treats them. She really brings them up like her own children."

"She brings them up like her own children until they're nine months old and she slaughters them," Peter said equably.

I soon became a convert to the limited palette and small victories of the green market. I started coming home with a satchel filled with New York City produce: scrappy, hard-necked, stressed-out.

"We're going to have greens with scapes and ramps," I announced.

"Can't we just have chicken fingers?" Luke asked.

"Scapes and greens and ramps: it sounds like a Ted Hughes poem," my wife said dubiously.

Over a few dinners and many post-market breakfasts, I came to know the chefs involved in the game, and thought that I had begun to glimpse something about their curious mix of entrepreneurial savvy, high principle, sensual engineering, and mordant despair. There was, for instance, a story Dan Barber loved to tell about the moment he thought he had identified the *Times* food critic William Grimes incognito in his restaurant.

"So by this point, I know, I mean *I know*, that this is Grimes. I mean, it's obvious, he's coming in night after night, he's trying different bits of the menu, very professional—it's obvious that the guy is a food critic, and I see him and I sort of recognize him." A visit from Grimes determines a restaurant's mood, because a Grimes review will determine its future. Dan Barber paused, and there was a quick, is-this-O.K.-in-front-of-a-civilian? glance between him and the other chefs before he went on. "We even put it out over the credit-card line. That's this informal system a couple of chefs have where they fax the fake credit-card names of the *Times* critic to all the other restaurants." He shrugged. "So the very next day, Grimes actually calls from the *Times* and asks for a wine list. Now, this guy, let's call him Mr. Hudsucker, had taken a menu with him—but not a wine list! So, I mean, now we're getting obvious." He went on, "That Friday, a 'Diner's Journal' article comes out that lists all the dishes Mr. Hudsucker ate at the bar! So, O.K., the next week H. M. Hudsucker makes another reservation, and we flip over backward for him, creating all these tasting menus, and the servers going through hula hoops. You have to be careful about that stuff, of course, because it's like the Enigma secret—you want to use it, but you

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don't want it to be obvious you've broken the code. Anyway, finally someone comes into the kitchen and I say, 'That's Grimes!' and he says, 'No, it isn't. I know Grimes, and that's not Grimes.' And I say, 'That's not Grimes? Then who the hell is that?' Later, a waiter went over without my knowing it and said, 'You seem so, uh, *passionate* about food, Mr. Hudsucker, are you in the business?' And he said, 'What business?' And the server said the food business. And Mr. Hudsucker said, 'The food business? I'm in the insurance business. I just like it here.'

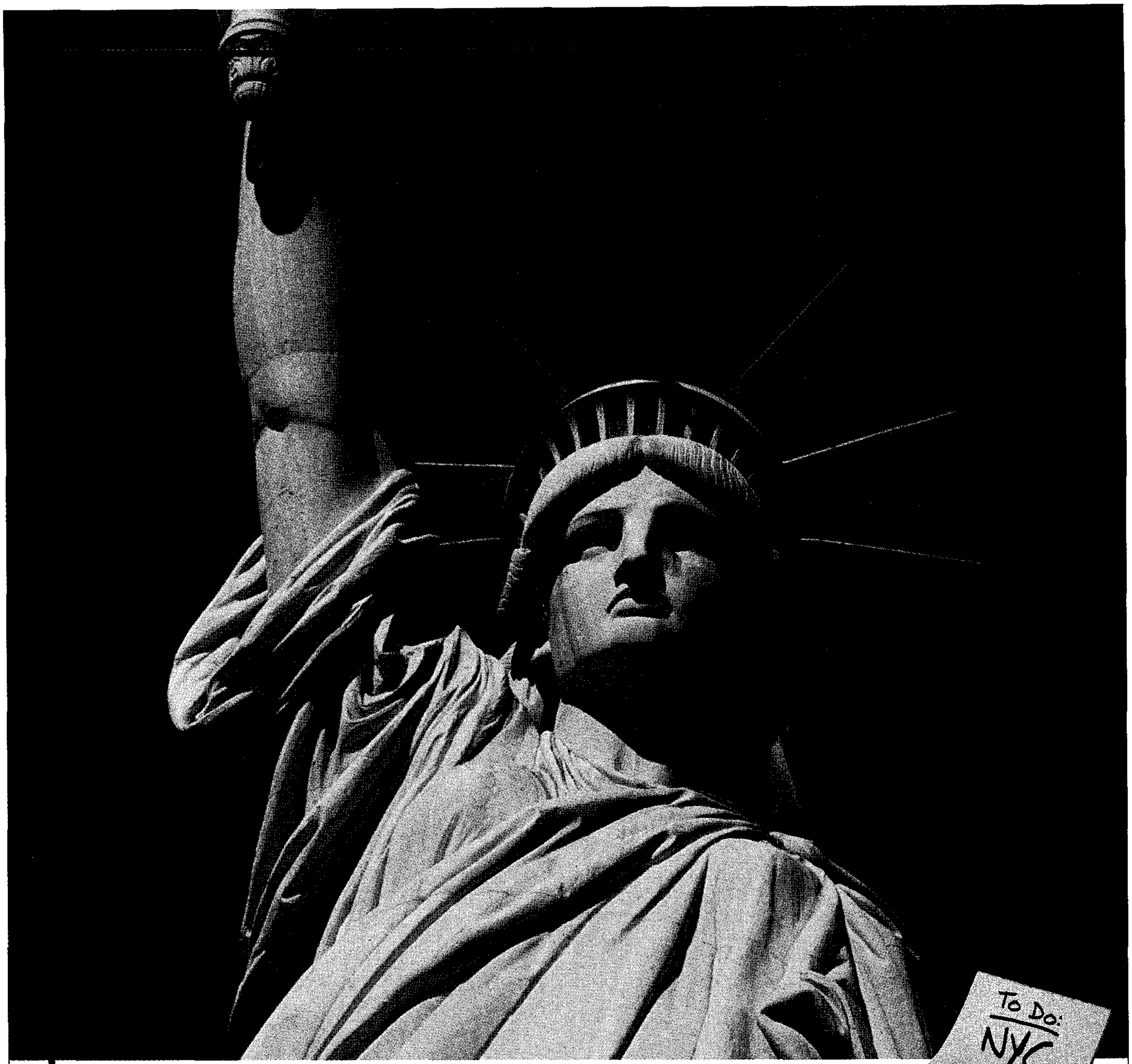
"And the really terrible part of the story is that he came back and we didn't do anything for him—not because we're malicious. It's just, just that at this point we're sort of disillusioned with H. M. Hudsucker, no fault of his own. And he walked out upset. It's ironic because . . . *he was the ideal diner!* He ate like a food critic without being one! The ideal guest."

Cooks, I learned, indulge the gaping outsider—I want to run away with the circus!—without even trying to explain to him what they know too well, that the tricks are easy; the hard part is preventing the clowns from committing suicide and the lion trainer from getting in bed with the ringmaster's wife. They're glad that people like the circus, but they understand that the circus is not the show; the circus is the ring around the show.

Though cooks worry about food and carp about critics, they obsess about their staffs. (I once saw Dan Barber struck dumb—speechless and incapable of movement—by the news, conveyed to him at the morning market by one of uptown's snazzier French chefs, that he had just hired away Dan's first-rate general manager.) This is partly because they have to, or there will be no one there to serve, but also because, just as good baseball managers know that an awful lot of what looks like pitching is really fielding, restaurant owners know that a lot of what tastes like good food is really good service. "The thing is, what's a good taste is a feeling, not just a sensation," Peter Hoffman said once. "So if you're feeling welcomed and warm, right then the food tastes better—the whole feeling is better, and you're not going to start prying apart your sensations, unless you're a writer. You just know you're having a good time, and you tell the next person, 'The food's wonderful there.' Once, we had a girl seating people and some friend of the house came in and she said, 'Just a minute, please.' *Just a minute, please.* Not rude or anything—but, for that person, everything we've been working to build up about Savoy is *gone* in that moment."

The craft secret, I realized, was that the craft was not the secret. There are lots of good cooks. The quality of the cooking in a good restaurant really depends on the daily preparation of a context, a hundred small sensations that precede any one bite and transcend it. The understanding that the food was not the thing from which all else came but the thing to which all else led was shared by all the harried and overworked cooks in the *jeu.* (The chefs who owned restaurants felt it most keenly, of course, but even those who worked for other people knew that the quality of the cooking depended on choices that were made before the cooking even started. No cook will ever talk about "a great recipe.") Philippe Bertineau is the perfect Frenchman—he was the original sous-chef at Daniel—and the American cooks looked on him as their Horowitz, their technical genius. He has the worried, harassed, ironic eyebrows that French cooks always seem to have. He grew up on a farm in the Poitou-Charentes region, and was perplexed by the American cooks' belief that their doctrine was a doctrine, rather than a revealed truth. "On the farm where I grew up, everything came from the farm," he told me. "Where else could it come from? I can't *believe* how impatient Americans are. They want to start"—he shrugged and made a mournful O with his mouth—"oh, mixing trout and cumin seed after they've worked in the kitchen for a day, before they know how to fillet a turbot."

Sara Jenkins, it turned out, was the daughter of an American foreign correspondent, and grew up in Spain and Lebanon and on a farm in Tuscany, and she practiced Tuscan farm cooking with an exceptional sincerity and purity of spirit. She believed in the doctrine with the conviction of someone who has given up "sophistication" in order to believe. She was a true Daughter of Alice,



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with the wide-eyed, militant innocence of the Salvation Army girl in “Guys and Dolls.” “I think *anything* can be delicious, if it's really fresh and seasonal,” she told me once over coffee. “I've always had problems with frog, for instance, until I went to Cambodia one summer. And, I mean, you may *think* you don't like frog, but what you don't like is frozen frog. These Cambodian frogs had been caught and skinned only minutes before, and it was . . . once you've had fresh frog, you have a completely different feeling about what frog can be.”

Romy Dorotan, the Filipino cook of Cendrillon, had been working part time at a restaurant in Philadelphia while he got a degree in economics at Temple in the seventies. One day, the cook quit, and he had to take over. He managed, he explained, because he had read a lot of books by the gloomy British sensualist Elizabeth David. “She really showed me the way,” he said. “I would read a bit of Elizabeth David every day, and her writing gave me the courage to cook.” It turned out that it was Romy who had been the Courtine reader.

I was drawn to Dan Barber, though, because, alone among the cooks, he had what every doctrine ought to inspire, and that is doubts, and not just doubts but Doubts. At the time we were going to the market together, *Food & Wine* named him and Mike Anthony two of the best new chefs in America, and they posed on the cover in their whites. But he still wasn't sure he wanted to spend the rest of his life cooking. He is in the position of a trombone virtuoso who never exactly intended to be a trombone player. “I mean, do I really want to spend my life doing this?” he said one morning. “It's incredibly hard to have a happy family life if you're a cook. I've heard about people who have, but I've never met any. And the money—I mean, we make money, but you could make more money by investing it in a C.D.” Chefs, like writers, are wrung out by the work. “It's insane, insane, insane, *insane*,” one said cheerfully. “All cooking is monotonous,” another said. “No matter how varied you think your technique is, you always end up taking something flabby and making it crunchy on the outside, tender on the inside. Food is always crispy out and tender in, over and over and over again.”

Dan even had doubts about the doctrine. One spring morning as we were walking through the market, we saw some hydroponic tomatoes. The other cooks walked right past them. “Now, this is a problem for me,” he said, stopping in front of the red pile. “You see, I mean, here it is a nice day, it's a hot day, and someone is going to come in and ask for a tomato salad, and a steak, and I'm going to have to be the virtuous guy who tells him, ‘No, you can't have it.’ I mean, is that a slightly weird role for me to be playing? The tomatoes are good, this local guy is growing them, and I have to be too goddam virtuous to serve them because they aren't dirt-grown in August? It worries me a lot, so I'm always trying to make compromises. I mean—Alice, forgive me, but I don't know if I always want to be that pure. Tonight, we'll do a cold tomato soup with coriander—and we'll press that on the tomato-hungry public.”

Peter walked over to the tomato stand. “The way I see it,” he said, “it's part of the pleasure of the seasons—waiting. I want to be satiated with tomatoes when tomato time comes. I want to wait.”

“Yeah, but the stockbroker or whatever doesn't want to wait.”

The conversation turned to a new restaurant that had just opened, three stories high and full of restaurant theatre (specially designed uniforms, that kind of thing).

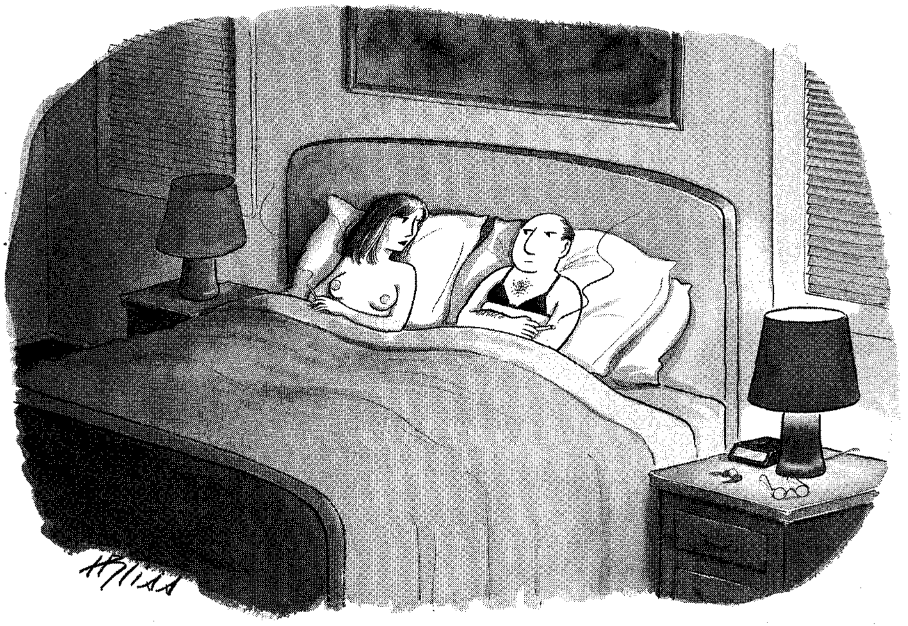
“I love that stuff,” Dan said brightly.

Peter stopped. “You're . . . kidding, right?”

“No, I'm not. I love that stuff.” He shrugged. “I guess I'm not reverent enough.”

It would be easy to be irreverent about what might be called the snob appeal behind the doctrine. All status, including the status of what we eat, depends on invidious comparison. At the turn of the last century, when only the wealthy could obtain out-of-season ingredients—strawberries in December, oranges in August—hothouse fruit had the prestige that organic fruit has now. When anyone at any time can go to the Food Emporium and shop for cherries and raspberries, glory attaches to someone who has the leisure to go to a market and shop for ramps and rhubarb.

But then all values in real life get expressed as manners; the mistake is to think that values are *only* manners. Everything is a show; what matters, as the bishop said to the mermaid, is what you're showing. “Seasonality,” whatever snobbishness it may express, also expresses a desire to connect, to a region, a place, a locality. (The larger, ecological point of the doctrine, that agribusiness is bad for civilization, is, of course, independent of the aesthetics of taste, but that point, in turn, could be met by the counterpoint that agribusiness of one kind or another is, on a desperately



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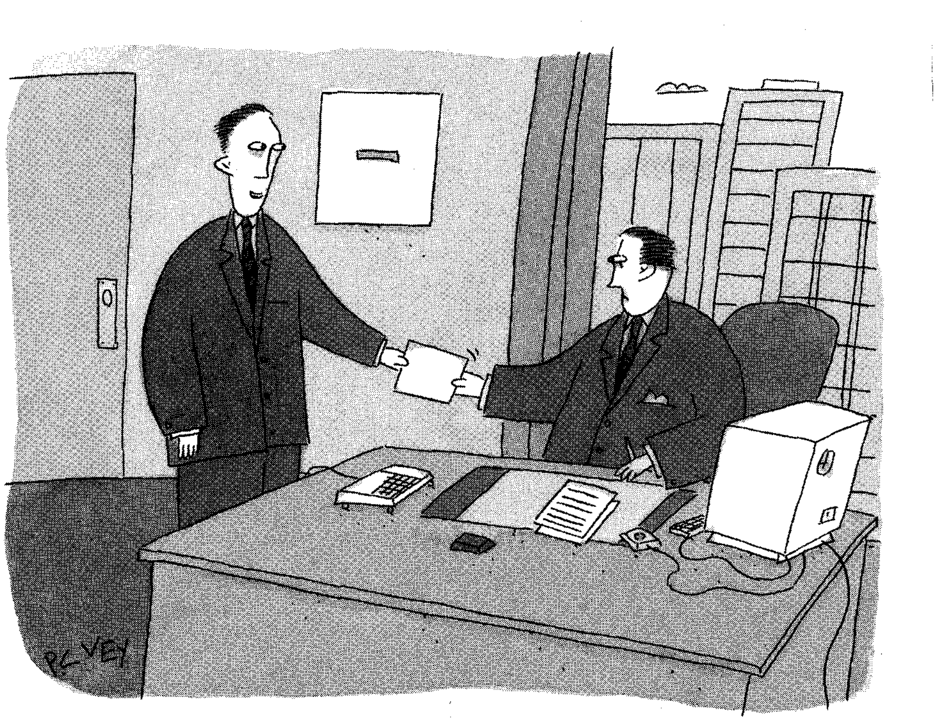


"If this doesn't get you indicted, nothing will."

• •

overpopulated planet, necessary for the survival of civilization at all. And this conversation can turn round and round over a dinner table until you are hungry again.)

After a two-month marination in the farmers' market, I had come to my own conclusions about what in the market was affectation and what real gain. Some things that you could find outside the market—oranges and lemons and pineapples and onions, red and yellow, and eggplant, and the tougher cuts of beef and pork, even raspberries and cherries and fresh herbs—were perfectly O.K. in their supermarket form. Other things, though—strawberries, potatoes, asparagus, fresh peas, green beans, poultry—had come to seem to me so inferior in their mass-produced versions that they ought to be made to do a perp walk from the produce bin to the compactor.

The list I finally decided on for the menus was composed of pale or delicate things: veal, trout, day-neutral strawberries, green garlic and its scapes, mustard greens, small sour cherries, snap peas shelled. The veal would be Amy's child-raised veal, and the trout from Max Creek farms at the market. (Of all the things I have loved to eat, trout seems to me the one that has almost disappeared from the world of tastes; farmed salmon is pleasant if uniform, but most farmed trout doesn't even taste like fish.) I threw in sorrel because I love it, and also because I have seldom seen it used except in a sauce for salmon. Since there was no starch, I allowed each cook to fill in as he wanted to.

The week after I chose the ingredients, we went from place to place, to see what each cook had made of the writer's list. As it turned out, each one created something far more individual than you could have imagined from the list of ingredients I'd e-mailed. At this point, of course, I should give out recipes, or at least pass around a platter of hors d'oeuvres. But I will do the best impression I can of Robert Courtine's sonorous style of assessment and boldly unleash a raft of exotic metaphor. So let it be said that Philippe Bertineau's version of the menu was a visit to a region of France: the innards of the veal, sweetbreads and kidneys, were crisped above the crunchy snap peas; on one side, a little blush of color, the sour cherries were recused from dessert and turned into a chutney. Although Bertineau cooks high, his references are to regional cooking: all French food aspires to the condition of country cooking; all haute cuisine pines for the farm where it began. His trout was stuffed with the mustard greens, so that the sweetness of the trout was set off by the startling spice of the greens, and he snipped the sorrel with scissors and used it in a chiffonade, rather than the expected imitation of sorrel sauce.

Sara Jenkins turned the same list into a July day in Tuscany. Her veal got minced up, yet not dumbed down, into a ragù, and she mixed her mustard greens with fresh ricotta over rigatoni. A poached or sautéed trout was, I think, too finicky for her country heart, and so she served smoked trout as a starter, on bread. It was an American's Tuscany, perhaps, but all flax and terraced fields nonetheless. Romy Dorotan seemed to turn everything toward the East, with sudden juxtapositions of cool courtyards and hot sunlight (the farm-raised veal was curried; the sweet trout heated with cayenne; baby fennel chilled with watermelon ice) and yet the more time you spent with his menu, the more its European and Davidian origins emerged. Though the ambitious juxtapositions of flavor were Eastern, the idea of bringing those juxtapositions forward, instead of leaving them lurking in the shadows of tradition, was entirely French.

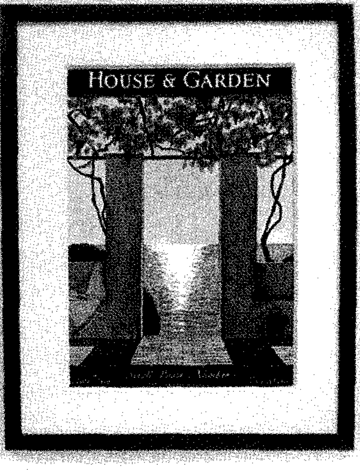
With the two chefs I knew best, not just their origins but their entire characters were evident. Peter Hoffman, whose commitment to the idea of the menu was most intense, made the most intensely committed menu. It was, if anything, too intense, too varied: he marinated the brook trout, for instance, so that it became a kind of superior, briny herring, and then married it with the mustard greens. We liked his dessert best of anything: a sour-cherry-and-day-neutral-strawberry compote, simple and sweet and acid, with buttermilk ice cream. Even Dan Barber's doctrinal doubts, I would insist, could be tasted in the menu he prepared, with Mike Anthony. They shelled the snap peas and turned them into a sublime sweet-pea purée, with yogurt and fresh herbs. It was a cultivated dish masquerading as a rustic one, from the market, certainly, but not entirely of the market. Their veal was slow-roasted in the Parisian manner, with the mustard greens and garlic reduced to a single resonant tang.

Like I say, I should give out recipes. But, failing that, I can hand out an insight. It was not a game. The metaphor of the *jeu*, at least, was all wrong. Cooks have no time for games. They do what they have to do. I had not created a game for them to play. I had created one more stress in a life of stresses, and they had turned it into a taste.

When the week of the menu was done, I had the cooks over for Sunday brunch. They looked at one another's menus: part of the pathos of their work, I realized, was that they were too busy to eat out much. Dan couldn't make it. A Con Ed power failure had hit his restaurant on Saturday morning, and he and Mike had spent the whole day distributing their produce to other people's fridges, and then had to spend all Sunday collecting it.

The cooks asked how it had been for *me*, and the only metaphor I could come up with was a homely one. I said that it had been like listening to each of them talk, and then, as they ate and argued, something else became clear to me. Searching for an occult connection between cooking and writing, I had missed the most obvious one. They are both dependencies of conversation. What unites cooks and writers is that their work flows from the river of human talk around a table. People cook to bring something to the table; people write to keep something that was said there. I enjoy the company of cooks, I realized, because I love the occasions they create for conversation.

Everyone agreed to try the game again in the fall, and, over bagels and lox, Peter said that he and his wife, Susan, had decided to remodel Savoy—to take out the beautiful candle-lit room and put in a bar and new décor, with framed black-and-white photographs, to make it more accessible to the Armani-shoppers who now fill SoHo. Their idea had always been to make a first-class neighborhood restaurant; now that the neighborhood had changed, they'd have to change, too. Cooks, it struck me, are even more immediately vulnerable to life's difficulties than writers are, and life, though it looks tender on the outside, is crunchy as can be on the inside, which may be why we prefer it with food. ♦



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LETTER FROM MEXICO

DISAPPEARING DISHES

How Diana Kennedy is rescuing everyday food.

BY ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO

In a peaceful town perched high on the rolling brown hills of Oaxaca, Diana Kennedy, cook, writer, and foremost authority on Mexican food, is hard at work on her latest research project. In a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves, khaki trousers, and comfortable shoes, she peers intently over the top of her reading glasses at her subject, a shy, elderly Mexican housewife named Clementina Baños. Kennedy questions her in a way that manages to be friendly and utterly efficient at the same time. "So, Señora, do you let the tomatoes cook a little with the onion before you put in the fruit? For how long, would you say? Ten minutes? Until they dry up a little? And then the fruit is cut up to what size? Cubes like this, hmm? Good!" She writes down the information in a spiral notebook, not hurriedly or unobtrusively, and yet without breaking Señora Clementina's concentration, which is focussed completely on Kennedy like a butterfly's on a lepidopterist.

The research session has been going on for about an hour in the kitchen of Señora Clementina, who, like her interviewer, resembles a sparrow with a tough constitution. Both women are in the vicinity of eighty, but Señora Clementina turns out to have about half the stamina. Kennedy had heard from the señora's son, a Oaxacan photographer, that one of his favorite dishes was *poblano* chilies stuffed with a *picadillo* of meat and fruit cloaked in fruit sauce, prepared by his mother for special occasions. Kennedy, who is working on the eighth volume of her ongoing investigation and presentation of the regional cuisines of Mexico, decided that the dish was worth an audition: it sounded interesting and—more to the point for someone who has been tracking down recipes in the farthest reaches of the country for more than thirty years—relatively unknown, even to her.

Standing next to Kennedy, I have my doubts about the recipe—it sounds awfully acidic—but, oh, what a kitchen! It was once a stable, Señora Clementina informs us, but she feels more comfortable cooking in this large, shady stone room with screened windows than in the small, ceramic-tiled kitchen with shiny fixtures that her children built for her in a modern house across the yard. One wall is entirely covered in earthenware pots of every size—mole for a family dinner, mole for a crowd, mole for the entire town—while the opposite wall is home to a set of burners, a small stove-top range, and a traditional hearth for cooking tortillas. A long, rough-hewn table in the center of the room is where the food is both prepared and eaten. A shelf running almost the length of the back wall holds metal pots, wooden spoons, and appliances of every sort, including, astonishingly, the kind of ten-speed trophy KitchenAid mixer that is to be found in New York only in the most ambitious kitchens.

The mixer will be used in an hour or so, once the chopped-meat stuffing is ready and chunks of apple and pineapple are simmering in the tomato sauce. Still skeptical of the recipe, I wonder aloud whether a dried chili, like *pasilla* or *guajillo*, might be useful to temper

Of all the notable women apostles of good food, Kennedy waged the loneliest battle.

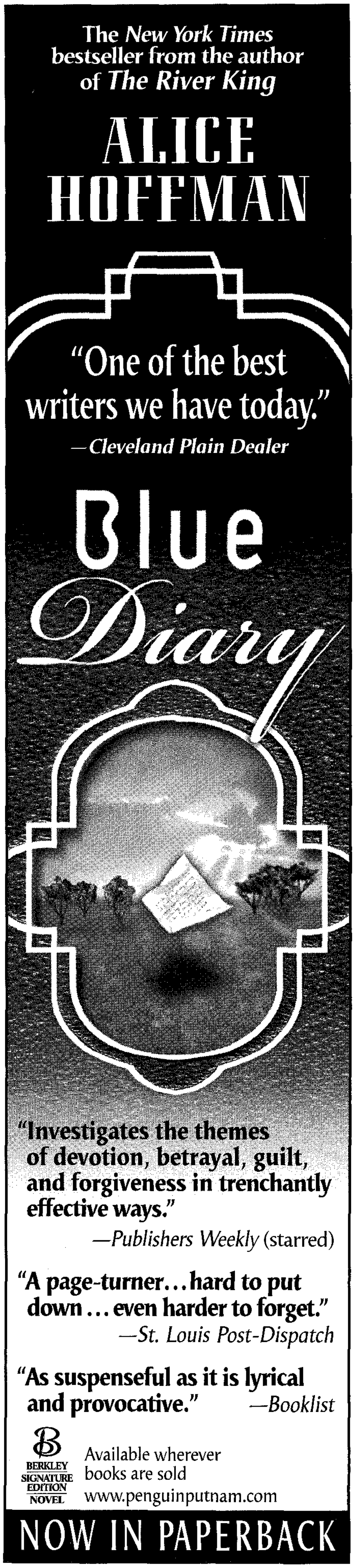
the acidity of the tomatoes and the fruit, but Kennedy brushes my suggestion aside. The green *poblano* chilies, shiny and naked-looking now that they have been charred and stripped of their waxy surface skin, are ready to be stuffed, coated first in flour and then in egg yolks and egg whites beaten until they form soft peaks, and fried. For Kennedy, who always asks her subjects to coach her as she assists in the preparation, the prospect of this stage of the meal must try her patience: she has whipped enough egg whites to cover the Mexico City cathedral in meringue, and coating and frying two dozen chilies could take Señora Clementina a very long time, speed not being an essential virtue among Mexican women who cook at home and live in a small town. Kennedy's back appears to be hurting, possibly because she has been on her feet for hours, possibly because it has required a great deal of driving in her Nissan double-cabin pickup truck to get to this kitchen, possibly because she spent the night at the local one-star hotel. ("Although the mattress wasn't bad, you know," she says sturdily when I express concern about her accommodations. "But I always carry a sleeping bag and a pillow just in case.") Absent-mindedly, she does a few stretching exercises and grumbles more or less to herself about the knives. She will not pack her own knives, because her attitude in the kitchen is non-interventionist, but it is an unhappy fact of life that knives in this type of kitchen can be very blunt indeed.

"No one ever seems to know how to sharpen a knife properly," she mutters, and it would seem that a display of temper is imminent—Kennedy is known for her tetchiness as much as for her wit—but then her attention is caught by a small corn mill clamped onto the edge of the appliance shelf. It is the hand-cranked model that is still standard equipment in kitchens throughout southern Mexico, but this one has been outfitted with a motor by Señora Clementina's son-in-law. Kennedy, who was unimpressed by the KitchenAid, is in love with the mill. Usefulness, inventiveness, and tradition rolled into one small, practical object! Legs apart, arms crossed, she beams at the motorized cornmeal grinder for a full minute before turning back to the task at hand. "And now, Señora?" she says, all business again. "You separate the eggs?"

RUVEN AFANADOR

Diana Southwood first arrived in Mexico in 1957. She came from England to join Paul Kennedy, a correspondent for the New York *Times*, whom she had met on a steamship. They were married the following year. She had not been brought up in a household consecrated to the kitchen arts—her mother was a kindergarten teacher, her father a salesman—but the gods gave her what she terms "a love of good food and an abounding curiosity and restlessness." In Mexico, she dined out often and travelled with Paul, and in the course of these early meals she understood that what was worth eating in Mexico wasn't the food served at elegant restaurants or gala dinners but the meals dished out at the *fondas* around Mexico City's multicolored marketplaces or cooked for fiestas in the republic's poorest and farthest-flung villages, or the dishes that maids fixed to pamper their *patronas* when they were affectionately disposed. *Chilaquiles*, a little on the spicy side to alleviate a hangover or a heartache; meatballs in chipotle sauce; squash-flower quesadillas; the thick, corn-based drink known as *atole*, perfumed with lemon or guava, at the end of a trying day; sweet tamales dotted with raisins and candied *acitrón*; eggs poached in *ancho* sauce and covered with cheese—everyday Mexican food.

Unaware that she was building up a precious store of knowledge, she ate her way through the country, and then turned her attention to the stove. Paul Kennedy's *Times* colleague Craig Claiborne came to Mexico in the mid-sixties and feasted at Kennedy's table several times. At the end of one meal, when she tried to press a Mexican cookbook into his hands, he said, "I will read a Mexican cookbook the day you write one." Years later, Diana Kennedy, by then widowed, decided to accept Claiborne's words for what they were: practical advice. It is important to Kennedy, a self-made woman, to point out that she never had to ask to get her book published. After her husband died, an editor at Harper & Row, Frances McCullough, came to a cooking course she had started teaching in New York, also at Claiborne's suggestion, and



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persuaded her to put a book together.

Perhaps only an Englishwoman of the old school like Kennedy, raised to keep her back straight and avoid self-pity under all circumstances, could have understood the alchemy by which the blossoming wonder that is Mexican cuisine in its purest form derived from the enslavement of Mexican women: getting up before dawn, lighting the fire with a bundle of ocote pine twigs, carrying water from the well, roasting the coffee beans, grinding them, taking the boiling corn off the fire and grinding it, crouched over the metate, a three-legged grinding stone; patting the tortillas flat between the palms of the hands, roasting the chilies then grinding them, crouched over the metate; killing the weekly chicken, plucking it, gathering wood for the fire to cook it, fetching more water, grinding pumpkin seeds, crouched over the metate.

Perhaps only someone who had shared a life with a journalist could have understood that if the treasure of ordinary Mexican food was to be rescued, the thing to do was report: set out at dawn across hills and valleys to a remote spot where you've heard they make chilies *rellenos* in fruit sauce; ask your friends' servants about their favorite soups, pestering them until, giggling a little, they make room for you next to the stove and let *you* grind pumpkin seeds, too. Diana Kennedy sought out cooks, interviewed them, and noted down the tiniest details of recipes so instinctive her informants didn't even know they were supposed to have names.

"And what do you call this dish?" Kennedy is asking Señora Clementina about a concoction she has decided to put together at the last minute.

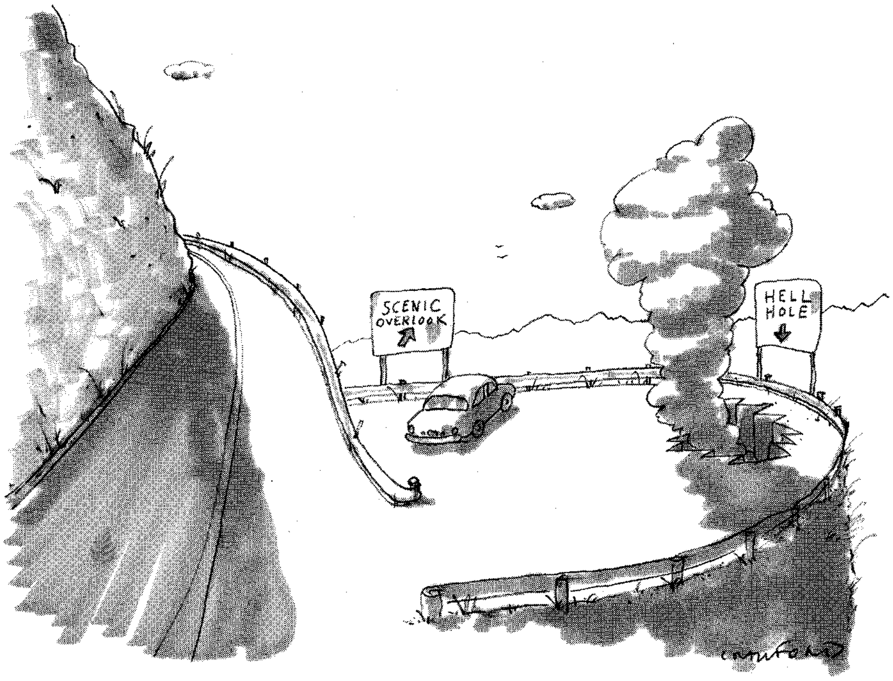
"Ay, Señora. Well, bean soup with *nopales*. It doesn't have any other name."

The *poblano* chilies having been coated, fried, served, and eaten (proving perfectly delicious, against all my expectations), Kennedy of the admirable digestion is now hunkering down to a plateful of the bean, pigs' knuckle, and nopal—prickly-pear cactus—soup while an exhausted, but pleased, Señora Clementina looks on. This is peasant cooking at its roughest, but the flavors are delicate, or inexplicable, or redolent of fields and rain and the rocky brown dirt from which Mexican campesinos manage to tug out a crop or two. Kennedy consumes the contents of the entire bowl happily. "Now, that's my kind of cooking," she declares. "You know, the more complicated dishes were created in Mexico once the Spanish were present, naturally. But wonderful wild things will always be found and incorporated into the cuisine by people who are hungry."

Of all the notable women apostles of good food from around the world—Julia Child, Madhur Jaffrey, Edna Lewis, Marcella Hazan, Elizabeth David, Alice Waters, Paula Wolfert—Kennedy may have been the most courageous, for she waged the loneliest battle. She was not a writer. She had no food credentials, and, travelling alone through Mexico, sometimes by car, sometimes on backcountry buses, she was charting her own course in a very literal way. But she was scrappy. (She is famous for pulling out a tape recorder on highway cops who flag her down with the prospect of scaring a juicy bribe out of a gringa. "Your name, officer?" she'll demand.) And she had a mission. If the mention of Mexican food in the United States no longer conjures up images of rubbery melted cheese, canned tamales, and taco salads, this is largely a result of her efforts. Thanks to her, food lovers in Connecticut and California first learned of the dizzying pleasures of Yucatán pork marinated in bitter orange, then wrapped in a banana leaf and barbecued in a pit; of the regal striped bass in *alcaparrado*, swimming triumphantly in its lake of capers and almonds; and of the crucial differences between *pozole* from Guerrero and *pozole* from Jalisco. (Both are soulful soups made with pork and *cacahuazintle* maize—it is the same corn used for hominy—but the similarities end there.) And, now that her work is at last being translated into Spanish, Mexicans, too, will be able to understand why the tamales from Michoacán called *corundas* should be wrapped in a long corn leaf folded to resemble a five-pointed star, according to pre-Hispanic tradition.

Since Mexican cuisine has become so trendy, there may be easier books to cook from, but it is safe to say that no serious book can fail to have the Kennedy opus as its central reference point. She respects her informants, crediting them and presenting the dishes without significant shortcuts, canned substitutes, or regard for the difficulty of achieving authenticity in, say, East Lansing. She has equal respect for her readers. ("I dedicate this recipe to my fans, who I know will search out the meanest-looking, hard little green mangoes in Latin American fruit stores and make this delectable fruit paste," she writes in the introduction to "Green mango roll.") And the clear, flowing, nostalgic prose—notably in her 1998 autobiographical cookbook, "My Mexico"—is in itself a tribute to her adoptive country, whose landscape, sense of identity, and culinary heritage are disappearing.

On her endless travels in the white truck, outfitted with a camper hood in the back, and a CB radio and a trove of opera tapes in the front, she has seen the change happen, and is dismayed both in



private and in print. For her, the links between ecology and cooking are obvious, particularly when it comes to the survival foods eaten for so long by poor Mexicans. More than the lush splendors of classic Mexican food, these foraged ingredients claim her interest now. "In Mexico," she told me, "a lot of wild foods became very popular, like the wild mushroom, which is both very elegant and used as meat by people who live up in the mountain forests. There is also the case of *escamoles*, ant eggs, which poor people in the state of Hidalgo used for protein for so long. If you destroy the environment, whether it's by cutting down forests or spraying crops, these foods disappear."

Kennedy estimates that dozens of types of chilies, along with beans and tomatoes of every size, flavor, and color, and an infinite variety of fish, crustaceans, edible weeds, cactuses, and desert and jungle fruits are vanishing. Mexicans once picked and cooked them imaginatively, but they are falling prey to agribusiness, land erosion, drought, rural migration, and warehouse food emporiums.

The crops are vanishing, and so, to a large extent, is the cuisine. The last holdouts of authentic Mexican cooking, campesinos who grow local produce and the artisans and *marchantes*, or salesmen and women of the open-air markets, live in a state of cultural siege. One of the worst ways to be poor in Mexico is by trying to make a living off the parched, increasingly exhausted land, and, where crops do grow, there is frequently no way to sell them at a profit; among other things, tax codes requiring sales receipts from small restaurants and food stalls encourage everyone to shop at the local supermarket. And then there is fast food, and globalization. "NAFTA has brought with it tasteless apples and pears from California or Seattle, so now they're available all year round," Kennedy said recently. "And this is ousting the local people, who used to collect pomegranates, say, or any other fruit from their local orchards when it was in season, and offer it for sale. People's tastes are changing as a result. They want to eat the most awful things, because they say, 'Oh, it's from the States, it must be good.'"

Kennedy lives in a modern adobe structure in rural Michoacán state (where I have been privileged to eat a couple of times, but only once, alas, that delectable green mango paste). Present everywhere are her twin passions for food and preservation of the natural world. Clamping a broad-brimmed straw hat on her head, she likes to stride ahead of her visitors and point out the sights: a greenhouse with wild orchids and an aubergine-colored *habanero* chili plant; a vegetable field where she and a gardener experiment with crops; a very large compost heap. The enormous vaulted living room is actually a kind of altar to a boulder, which was found there and given pride of place. Her study overlooks a jungle of flowering vines and trees. The traditional Mexican kitchen, in which she holds cooking lessons, is a beauty. But none of these wonders are exhibited by the hostess with quite as much pride as the extra-large rainwater cistern and an underground filter plus lily pond designed to recycle the house water. Sometimes the system works, sometimes it doesn't, but for emergencies Kennedy has also built what may well be the world's most beautiful latrine—on a hill, with a view, and carpeted always with lovely-smelling fresh cedar boughs.

On the phone, Kennedy tells me about a recent meal she is both amused by and proud of: the lunch she served in Michoacán to a fellow-environmentalist, Charles, Prince of Wales, who was in Mexico on a private visit. Kennedy does not, as a general rule, make concessions, in her cookbooks or elsewhere, but she does have a sense of occasion, and she pulled out all the stops for the royal meal. For cocktails: to go with the tequila apéritifs, fresh tortillas, small pumpkin seeds toasted and ground with roasted *habanero* chilies, guacamole enhanced with grapes and pomegranate seeds. For the meal: cream-of-squash-flower soup, followed by pork loin baked in banana leaves and served with cactus and young fresh peas in a green chili sauce. For dessert: guavas stuffed with coconut, along with mango sorbet topped by tequila-soaked strips of mango. Finally, the green mango paste. (Prince Charles took a chunk of it home with him.)

"And was he nice?" I asked.

"Well, you know what, dear, he was delightful. He took a tremendous interest in everything, and he really was very charming." She paused, and over the line I could hear her gathering her principles around her. No concessions. "I'm not a royalist, you know," she said firmly. "I have trouble with authority." ♦

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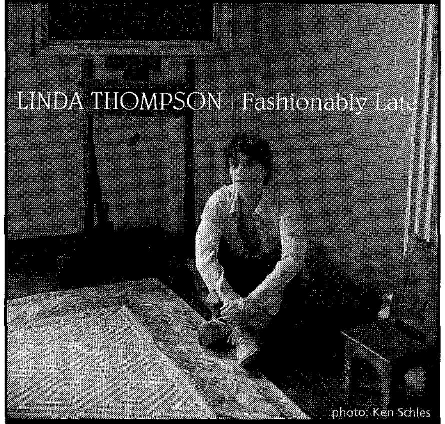

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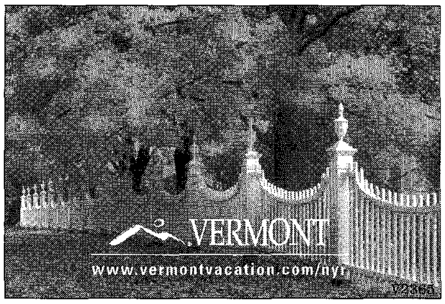

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PERSONAL HISTORY

THE REPORTER'S KITCHEN

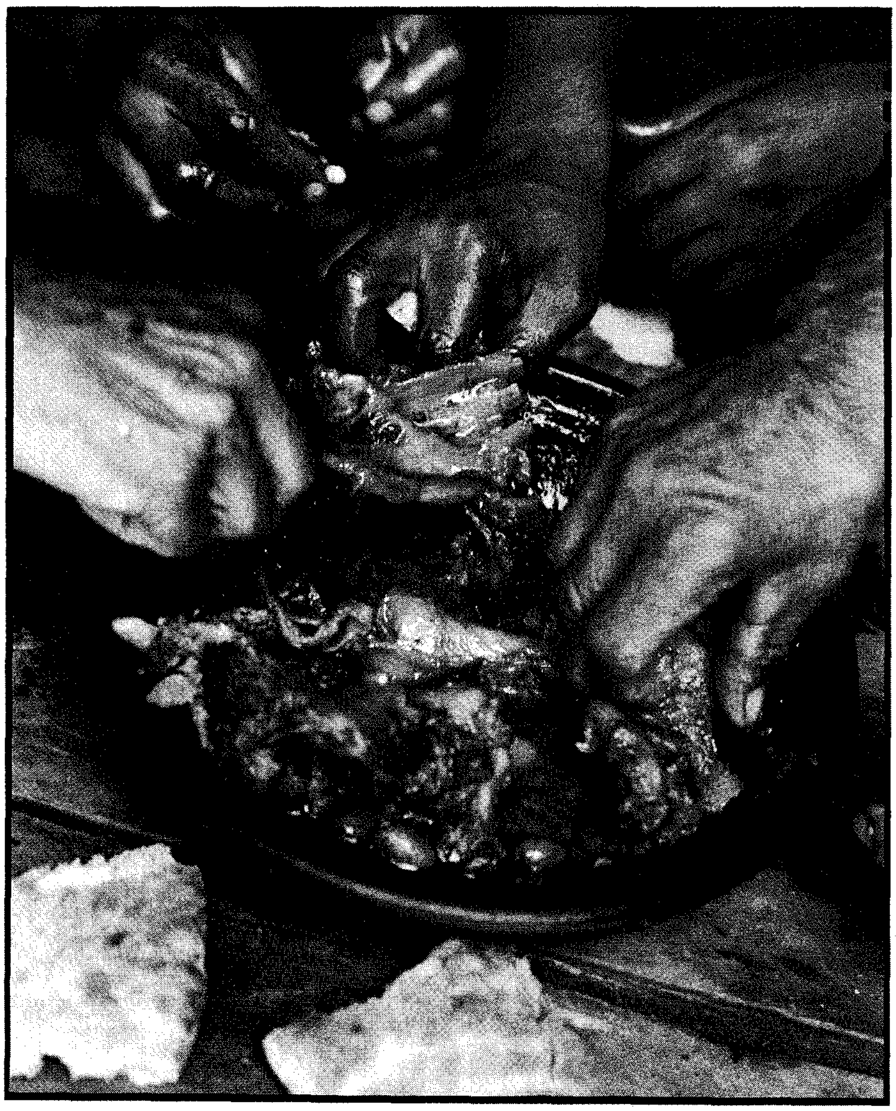
A recipe for writing.

BY JANE KRAMER

The kitchen where I'm making dinner is a New York kitchen. Nice light, way too small, nowhere to put anything unless the stove goes. My stove is huge, but it will never go. My stove is where my head clears, my impressions settle, my reporter's life gets folded into *my* life, and whatever I've just learned, or think I've learned—whatever it was, out there in the world, that had seemed so different and surprising—bubbles away in the very small pot of what I think I know and, if I'm lucky, produces something like perspective. A few years ago, I had a chance to interview Brenda Milner, the neuropsychologist who helped trace the process by which the brain turns information into memory, and memory into the particular consciousness called a life, or, you could say, into the signature of the person. Professor Milner was nearly eighty when I met her, in Montreal, at the neurological institute at McGill, where she'd worked for close to fifty years, and one of the things we talked about was how some people, even at her great age, persist in "seeing" memory the way children do—as a cupboard or a drawer or a box of treasures underneath the bed, a box that gets full and has to be cleaned out every now and then to make room for new treasures they collect. Professor Milner wasn't one of those people, but I am. The memory I "see" is a kind of kitchen, where the thoughts and characters I bring home go straight into a stockpot on my big stove, reducing old flavors, distilling new ones, making a soup that never tastes the same as it did the day before, and feeds the voice that, for better or worse, is *me* writing, and not some woman from another kitchen.

I knew nothing about stockpots as a child. My mother was an awful cook, or, more accurately, she didn't cook, since in her day it was fashionable not to go anywhere near a kitchen if you didn't have to. Her one creation, apart from a fluffy spinach soufflé that for some reason always appeared with the overcooked turkey when she made Thanksgiving dinner (a task she undertook mainly to avoid sitting in the cold with the rest of us at the Brown Thanksgiving Day home football game), would probably count today as haute-fusion family cooking: matzo-meal-and-Rhode-Island-johnnycake-mix pancakes, topped with thick bacon, sour cream, and maple syrup. Not even our housekeeper and occasional cook could cook—beyond a tepid, sherried stew that was always presented at parties, grandly, as lobster thermidor, and a passable apple filling that you could spoon out, undetected, through the large steam holes of an otherwise tasteless pie. I don't think I ever saw my father cook anything, unless you can call sprinkling sugar on a grapefruit, or boiling syringes in an enamel pan, the way doctors did in those days, cooking. (I use the pan now for roasting chickens.) The only man in my family with a recipe of his own was my brother Bobby, who had mastered a pretty dessert called pumpkin chiffon while courting an Amish girl who liked pumpkins. My own experience in the kitchen was pretty much limited to reheating the Sunday-night Chinese takeout early on Monday mornings, before anyone else was awake to eat it first.

I started cooking when I started writing. My first dish was tuna curry (a can of Bumble Bee, a can of Campbell's cream-of-mushroom soup, a big spoonful of Durkee's curry powder, and a cup of instant Carolina rice), and the recipe, such as it was, came from my friend Mary Clay, who claimed to have got it directly from the cook at her family's Kentucky farm. It counted for me as triply exotic, being at once the product of a New York supermarket chain, the bluegrass South, and India. And never mind that the stove I cooked on then was tiny, or that "dining" meant a couple of plates and a candle on my old toy chest, transformed into the coffee table of a graduate-school rental, near Columbia; the feeling was high sixties, meaning that a nice girl from Providence could look forward to enjoying literature, sex, and cooking in the space of a single day. I don't remember whom I was making the curry for, though I must have liked him, because I raced home from Frederick Dupee's famous lecture on symbolism in "Light in August" to make it. What I do remember is how comforting it was to be standing at that tiny stove, pinched into a Merry Widow and stirring yellow powder into Campbell's soup, when I might have been pacing the stacks at Butler Library, trying to resolve the very serious question of whether, after Dupee on Faulkner, there was anything left to say about literature, and, more precisely, the question of whether *I'd* find anything to say in a review—one of my first assignments in the real world—of a book of poems written by Norman Mailer on the occasion of having stabbed his second wife. I remember this because, as I stood there, stirring powder and a soupçon of Acapulco Gold into my tuna curry, I began to accept that, while whatever I did say wasn't going to be the last word on the poetics of domestic violence, it would be *my* word, a lot of Rhode Island still in it, a little New York, and, to my real surprise, a couple of certainties: I was angry at Norman Mailer; I was twenty-one and didn't think that you should stab your wife. Mailer, on the other hand, had produced some very good lines of poetry. He must have been happy (or startled) to be taken for a poet at all, because a few weeks after my review ran—in a neighborhood paper you could pick up free in apartment-house lobbies—his friend Dan Wolf, the editor of what was then a twelve-page downtown alternative weekly called the *Village Voice*, phoned to offer me a job.



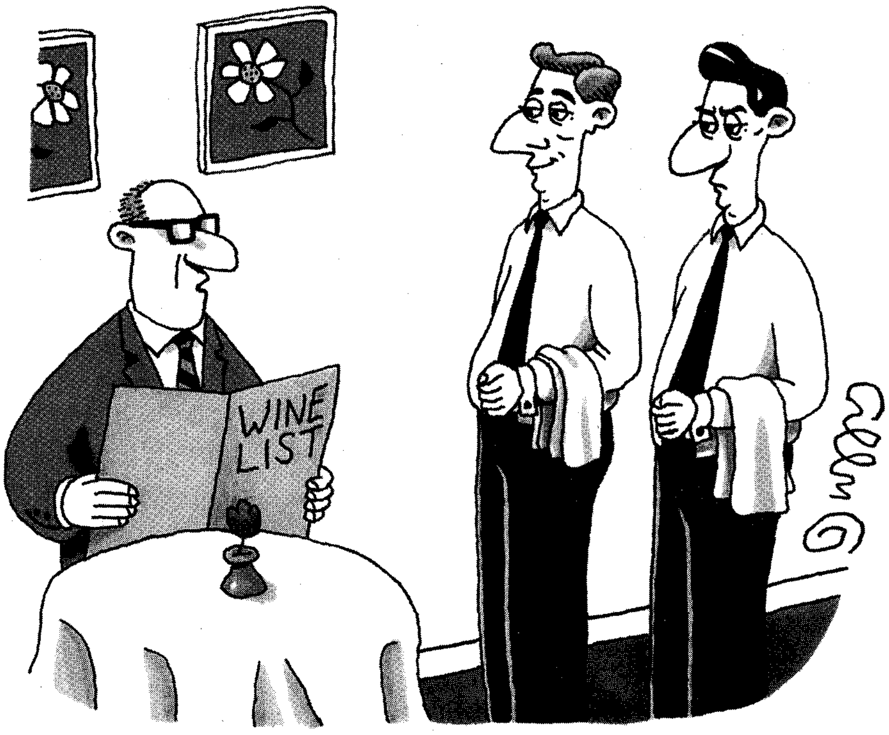
I often preserve lemons for a tagine when I'm beginning a piece about politics.

RUVEN AFANADOR

I bought a madeleine mold, at a kitchen shop near the old *Voice* offices, on Sheridan Square. It was my first purchase as a reporter who cooked—a long, narrow pan of shallow, ridged shells, waiting to produce a Proust—but though I liked madeleines, they didn't collect my world in a mouthful, the way the taste of warm apples, licked from the cool tingle of a silver spoon, still does, or, for that matter, the way the terrible chicken curry at the old brasserie La Coupole, in Paris, always reminded me of Norman Mailer's wife. The mold sat in my various kitchens for ten years before I moved to the kitchen I cook in now, and tried madeleines again, and discovered that, for me, they were just another cookie—which is to say, not the kind of cookie that belonged in the ritual that for years has kept me commuting between my study and my stove, stirring or beating or chopping or sifting my way through false starts and strained transitions and sticky sentences.

The cookies I like to make when I'm writing are called "dream cookies." I made my first batch in my friend John Tillinger's kitchen, in Roxbury, Connecticut, at one in the morning, in a mood perhaps best described by the fact that I'd just been awakened by the weight of a large cat settling on my head. The cookies were a kind of sand tart. They had a dry, gritty, burned-butter taste, and I must have associated them with the taste of deliverance from sweet, smooth, treacherous things like purring cats. I say this because a few years later I found myself making them again, in North Africa, in the middle of reporting a story about a tribal feud that involved a Berber wedding and was encrypted—at least, for me—in platters of syrupy honeyed pastries, sugared couscous, and sweet mint tea.

At the time, my kitchen was in the Moroccan city of Meknès, where my husband was doing ethnographic research, but my story took me to a village a couple of hours up into the foothills of the Middle Atlas Mountains. It was a wild, unpleasant place. Even today, some thirty years, a couple of wars and revolutions, and an assortment of arguably more unpleasant places later, I would call it scary. The wedding in question, a three-day,



"And don't try to pull the old 'good wine steward, bad wine steward' routine."

her-house-to-his-house travelling celebration, was about to begin in the bride's village—which had every reason to celebrate, having already provided the groom's village with a large number of pretty virgins and, in the process, profited considerably from the bride-prices those virgins had commanded: goats, chickens, silver necklaces, brass plates, and simple, practical, hard cash, some of it in negotiable European currencies. The problem was that none of the young men in the bride's village were at all interested in the virgins available in the groom's village, whose own supply of goats, chickens, necklaces, plates, and money was consequently quite depleted. All that village had was an abundance of homely daughters—or, you could say, the bad end of the balance of trade in brides. As a result, the men in the groom's village were getting ready to fight the men in the bride's village, a situation that left the women in both villages cooking day and night, in a frantic effort to turn their enemies into guests.

By then, I was close to being an enemy myself, having already broken one serious taboo: I had asked the name of somebody's aunt in a conversation where the naming of paternal aunts in the company of certain female relatives was tantamount to calling catastrophe down on the entire family, and the women had had to abandon their cooking in order to purge the premises, which they did by circling the village, ululating loudly, while I sat there in the blazing sun, under strict orders to keep the flies off a platter of dripping honey cakes. It hadn't helped any that, in a spirit of apology (or perhaps it was malice), I then invited the villagers to Meknès and served them my special Julia Child's *bœuf bourguignon*, which made them all quite ill. A few days later, I went to the medina and bought some almonds for dream cookies. I don't know why I did it. Maybe I was homesick. Certainly, I was being spoiled, knowing that Malika, the young Arab woman who worked for me and became my friend, would grind those almonds into a sandy paste as quickly as she had just peeled peaches for my breakfast—which is to say, in less time than it took me to check for scorpions underneath the two cushions and copper tray that were then my dining room. But I think now that I was mainly trying to find my voice in a country where some women couldn't mention an aunt to a relative—where the voices of most women, in fact, were confined to their ululations. Once, I heard that same shrill, flutey cry coming from my own kitchen and rushed in to find Malika shaking with pain and bleeding; she was sixteen, and had taken something or done something to herself to end a pregnancy that I had never even suspected. After that, I would sometimes hear the cry again, and find her huddled in a corner of the room, struck with a terror she could not describe. No one had ever asked her to describe it, not even the man she'd married when, by her own reckoning, she was twelve years old.

I never finished the story about the Berber bride. I was a bride myself, and this posed something of a problem for my erstwhile village friends, who had wanted to find me a husband from the tribe and thus assure themselves of the continued use of, if not actually the title to, my new Volkswagen. In the event, one night, after we'd been trading recipes, the women sent me home with a complicated (and fairly revolting) "love recipe" to try out on the husband I already had, and it turned out—at least, according to the neighbors who warned me not to make it—to be a bit of black magic whose purpose was, to put it discreetly, less amorous than incapacitating. I took this as a sign that it was time to come down from the mountains. I wrote a book about an Arab wedding instead, and I waited until I was back in my study in New York to finish it. The lesson for me, as a writer, was that I had to burrow back into my own life before I could even start thinking clearly about someone else's, or come to terms with the kinds of violence that are part of any reporter's working life, or with the tangles of outrage that women reporters, almost inevitably, carry home with their notes.

In New York, I cook a lot of Moroccan food. I keep a *couscousière* on the shelf that used to hold the madeleine mold, and then the Swedish pancake skillet and the French crêpe pan and the Swiss fondue set and the electric wok that my husband's secretary sent for Christmas during a year when I was stir-frying everything in sesame oil—something I gave up because stir-frying was always over in a few fraught seconds and did nothing at all for my writing. The cooking that helps my writing is slow cooking, the kind of cooking where you take control of your ingredients so that whatever it is you're making doesn't run away with

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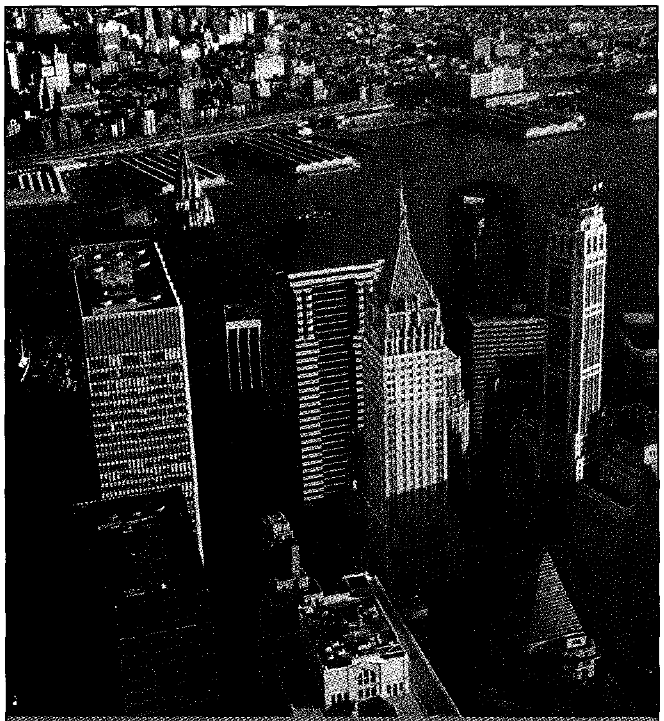

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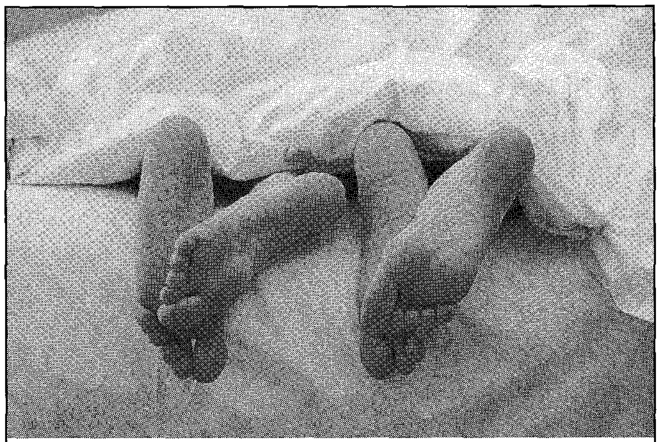

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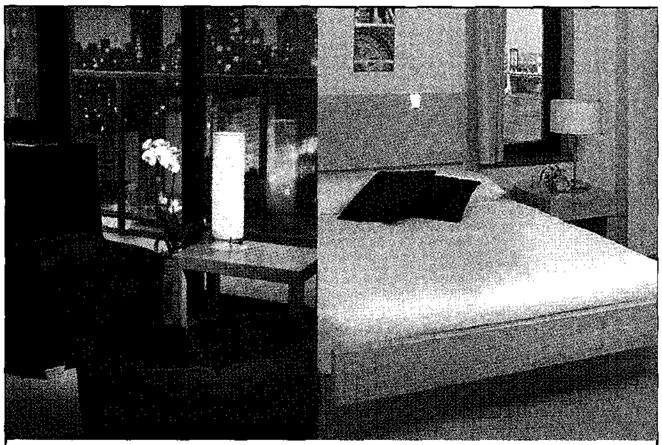

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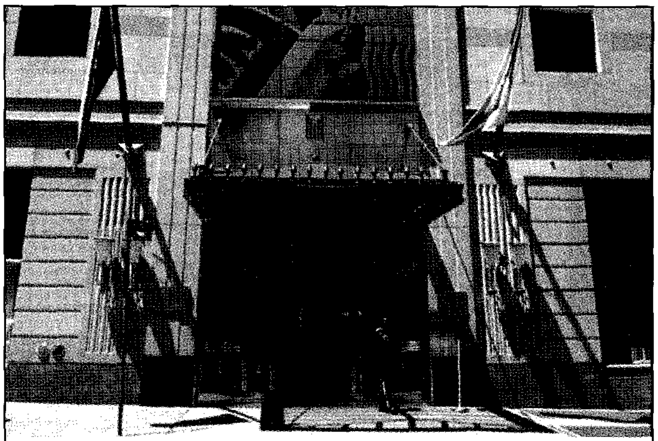

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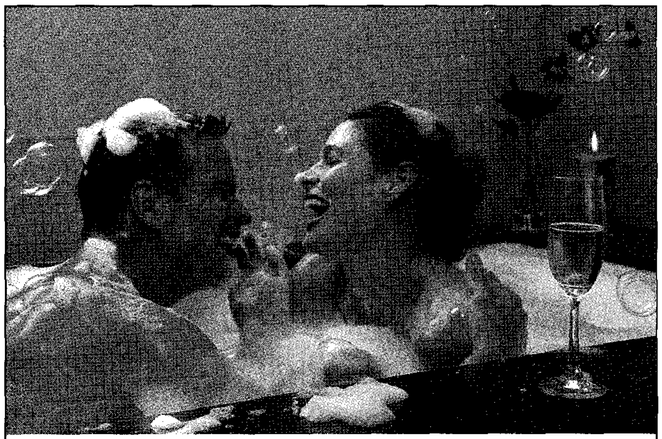

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you, the way words can run away with you in a muddled or unruly sentence. Cooking like that—nudging my disordered thoughts into the stately measure of, say, a good risotto simmering slowly in a homemade broth—gives me confidence and at least the illusion of clarity. And I find that for clarity, the kind that actually lasts until I'm back at my desk, poised over a sentence with my red marker, there is nothing to equal a couscous steaming in its colander pot, with the smell of cumin and coriander rising with the steam. That's when the words I was sure I'd lost come slipping into my head, one by one, and with them even the courage to dip my fingers in and separate the grains.

Some of the food I learned to cook in Morocco didn't translate to New York. I have yet to find a hen in New York with fertilized eggs still inside it—a delicacy that the Meknasi would produce for their guests in moments of truly serious hospitality—not at the halal markets on Atlantic Avenue or even at International Poultry, on Fifty-fourth Street, poulterer to the Orthodox carriage trade. I cannot imagine slaughtering a goat on Central Park West and then skinning it on the sidewalk, if for no reason other than that I'm an ocean away from the old *f'qui* who could take that skin before it stiffened and stretch it into a nearly transparent head for a clay drum with a personal prayer baked into it. I have never again squatted on my heels, knees apart and back straight, for the hours it takes to sift wheat through a wooden sieve and then slap water into it for a flat-bread dough, though in the course of various assignments I have made chapati with Ugandan Asian immigrants in London, stirred mealie-mealie with Bushmen in Botswana, and rolled *pâte feuilletée* with Slovenian autoworkers in the projects of Södertälje, Sweden. And I am still waiting for permission to dig a charcoal pit in Central Park for the baby lamb that I will then smother in mint and cumin, cover with earth, and bake to such tenderness that you could scoop it out and eat it with your fingers.

But when I'm starting a piece about politics, especially French politics, I will often begin by preserving the lemons for a chicken *tagine*, perhaps because a forkful of good *tagine* inevitably takes me back to the home of the French-speaking sheikh whose wives taught me how to make it (to the sound of Tom Jones singing "Delilah" on a shortwave radio), and from there to the small restaurant in Paris where I ate my first *tagine* outside Morocco, and from *there* to the flat of a surly French politician named Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who lived near the restaurant, and who unnerved me entirely during our one interview by balancing cups of espresso on the breasts of a hideous brass coffee table that appeared to be cast as a woman's torso, while barking at me about French nuclear policy. Similarly, I make *choucroute* whenever I'm starting a piece that has to do with music, because my first proper *choucroute*—the kind where you put fresh sauerkraut through five changes of cold water, squeeze it dry, strand by strand, and then braise it in gin and homemade stock, with a ham hock and smoked pork and sausages buried inside it—was a labor of love for the eightieth birthday of the composer George Perle; and since then the smell of sausage, gin, and sauerkraut mingling in my oven has always reminded me of the impossible art of composition, and set my standards at the level of his luminous woodwind suites.

On the other hand, when I write about art I like to cook a rabbit. My first rabbit was also, unhappily, my daughter's pet rabbit, and I cooked it with understandable misgiving, one summer in the Vaucluse, after an old peasant sorcerer who used to come over during the full moon to do the ironing took it from its hutch and presented it to her, freshly slaughtered and stuffed with rosemary, on the morning of her first birthday, saying that once she ate it she would have her friend with her "forever." We had named the rabbit Julien Nibble, in honor of our summer neighbor Julien Levy, a man otherwise known as the dealer who had introduced Ernst and Gorky and most of the great Surrealists to New York, and my daughter, who is thirty-one now, has refused to eat rabbit since we told her the story, when she was six or seven. But I have kept on cooking rabbit, changing recipes as the art world changes, and always asking myself what Julien would have made of those changes, and, of course, whether he would have liked the dinner. There was the saddle of rabbit in a cognac-cream sauce that smoothed out my clotted thoughts about a middle-aged Italian painter with what I'd called "an unrequited sense of history." There was the *lapin niçoise*, with olives, garlic, and tomatoes, that saw me through the first paragraphs of a story about the politics of public sculpture in the South Bronx. There was the rich, bitter rabbit ragout—a recipe from the Croatian grandmother of the Berlin artist Renata Stih—that got me started after a couple of earthquakes hit Assisi, shattering the frescoes on the ceiling of San Francesco into a million pieces. Dishes like these become invocations, little rituals you invent for yourself, in the hope that your life and your work will eventually taste the same.

Good cooking is much easier to master than good writing. But great cooking is something different, and during the years that I've stood at my stove, stirring and sprinkling and tasting, waiting for a sauce to thicken and a drab sentence to settle—if not precisely into echoing, Wordsworthian chords, at least into a turn of phrase that will tell you something you didn't already know about Gerhard Schröder, say, or Silvio Berlusconi—my cooking has leaped ahead by several stars, leaving my writing in the shade. Some dishes have disappeared from my repertoire; tuna curry, for example, has been replaced by the crab-and-spun-coconut-cream curry I first tasted in Hong Kong in 1990 and have been working on ever since, and never mind that the crab in Hong Kong turned out to be doctored tofu, while mine arrives from a Broadway fishmonger with its claws scissoring through the paper bag. Some dishes I've sampled in the course (and cause) of duty are memorable mainly because I've tried so hard to forget them. For one, the crudités I managed to get down at Jean-Marie Le Pen's gaudy and heavily guarded Saint-Cloud villa, with M. Le Pen spinning an outsize plastic globe that held a barely concealed tape recorder, and a couple of Dobermans sniffing at my plate. For another, the rat stew I was served in the Guyana jungle by a visibly unstable interior minister, who had accompanied me there (en route to a "model farm" hacked out of the clearing that had once been Jonestown) in a battered Britten-Norman Islander with no radar or landing lights and a thirteen-year-old Air Force colonel for a pilot. Some dishes I've repressed, like the cauliflower soup that was ladled into my plate in the dining room of a Belfast hotel just as a terrorist's bomb went off and a wing of the building crumbled, leaving me, the friend whose couch I'd been using for the past week, and a couple of other diners perched in the middle of the sky—"like saints on poles," a man at the next table said, returning to his smoked salmon. Some dishes I've loved but would not risk trying myself, like the pork roast with crackling that Pat Hume, the wife of the politician and soon-to-be Nobel peace laureate John Hume, was in the process of carving, one Sunday lunch in Derry, when a stray bullet shattered the window and lodged in the wall behind her; she didn't stop carving, or even pause in her conversation, which, as I remember, had to do with whether the New York subways were so dangerous as to preclude her visiting with the children while John was in Washington, advising Teddy Kennedy on how to get through a family crisis.

Some dishes I've left in better hands. It's clear to me that I'm no match for the sausage vender at the Frankfurt Bahnhof when it comes to grilling a bratwurst to precisely that stage where the skin is charred and just greasy enough to hold the mustard, and then stuffing the bratwurst into just enough roll to get a grip on, but not *so* much roll that you miss the sport of trying to eat it with anything fewer than four paper napkins and the business section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In the same way, I know that I will never equal my friend Duke, a Herero tribesman known from the Kalahari Desert to the Okavango Delta by his "Dukes of Hazzard" T-shirt, in the art of thickening a sauce for a guinea fowl or a spur-winged goose in the absence of anything resembling flour. Duke was the cook at my fly camp when I was out in the delta researching a piece about "bush housekeeping," and he thickened his sauces there by grating roots he called desert potatoes into boiling fat. But the secret was how many potatoes and, indeed, how to distinguish those potatoes from all the other roots that looked like potatoes but were something you'd rather not ingest. I never found out, because the day we'd planned to fly to the desert to dig some up a tourist camping on a nearby game preserve was eaten by a lion, and my pilot volunteered to collect the bones. Food like that is, as they say in the art world, site-specific.

Take the dish I have called *Canard sauvage rue du Cherche Midi*. I cooked my first wild duck in a kitchen on Cherche Midi in 1982, and during the sixteen years that I lived between Paris and New York I tuned the recipe to what my friends assured me was perfection. But it has never produced the same frisson at my New York dinner table that it did at the picnic table in my Paris garden, if for no reason other than that my neighbors across the court in New York do not punctuate my dinner parties with well-aimed rotten eggs, accompanied by shouts of "Savages!," the way one of my Paris neighbors—a local crank by the name of Jude—always did, and that consequently my New York guests know nothing of the pleasure that comes from pausing between bites of a perfect duck in order to turn a hose full blast on the open window of someone who dislikes them.

Some dishes just don't travel, no matter how obvious or easy they seem. I know this because I tried for a year to duplicate the magical fried chicken known to aficionados as Fernand Point's Poulet Américain—a recipe so simple in itself that no one since that legendary Vienne chef has ever dared to put it on a menu. I have never even attempted to duplicate the spicy chicken stew that the actor Michael Goldman heats up on a Sterno stove in his damp, smelly Paris *cave*, surrounded by the moldy bottles of Lafite and Yquem and Grands Echezeaux that you know he's planning to open as the night wears on. Nor have I attempted the Indonesian rijsttafel—which is basically just a platter of rice with little bowls of condiments and sauces—that my late friend George Hoff, a Dutch kendo master and night-club bouncer, tossed off one night, in London, after a long and strenuous demonstration that involved raising a long pole and slamming it down to within a centimetre of my husband's head. Or the fish grilled by a group of young Portuguese commandos in the early summer of 1974—I was covering their revolution; they were taking a break from it—over a campfire on a deserted Cabo de São Vicente beach. Or, for that matter, the S'mores my favorite counsellor roasted over a campfire at Camp Fernwood, in Poland, Maine (and never mind that I hated Camp Fernwood). Or even popcorn at the movies.

But most things do travel, if you know

FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF ANNE VERVEINE

And yet the fountain spends itself, and it is
in the clear

light of its losing that we seem
to take delight:

you dipped your hand in its running braid
to sprinkle my forehead, my lips.

Garden deities observed us: three nymphs
with moss staining their haunches, a pug-nosed faun.

The wound in water closed
perfectly around your gesture, erasing it,

so that only the glimmer, swiftly
drying, on my face recalled

our interruption
of the faultless, cold, passionate, perpetual

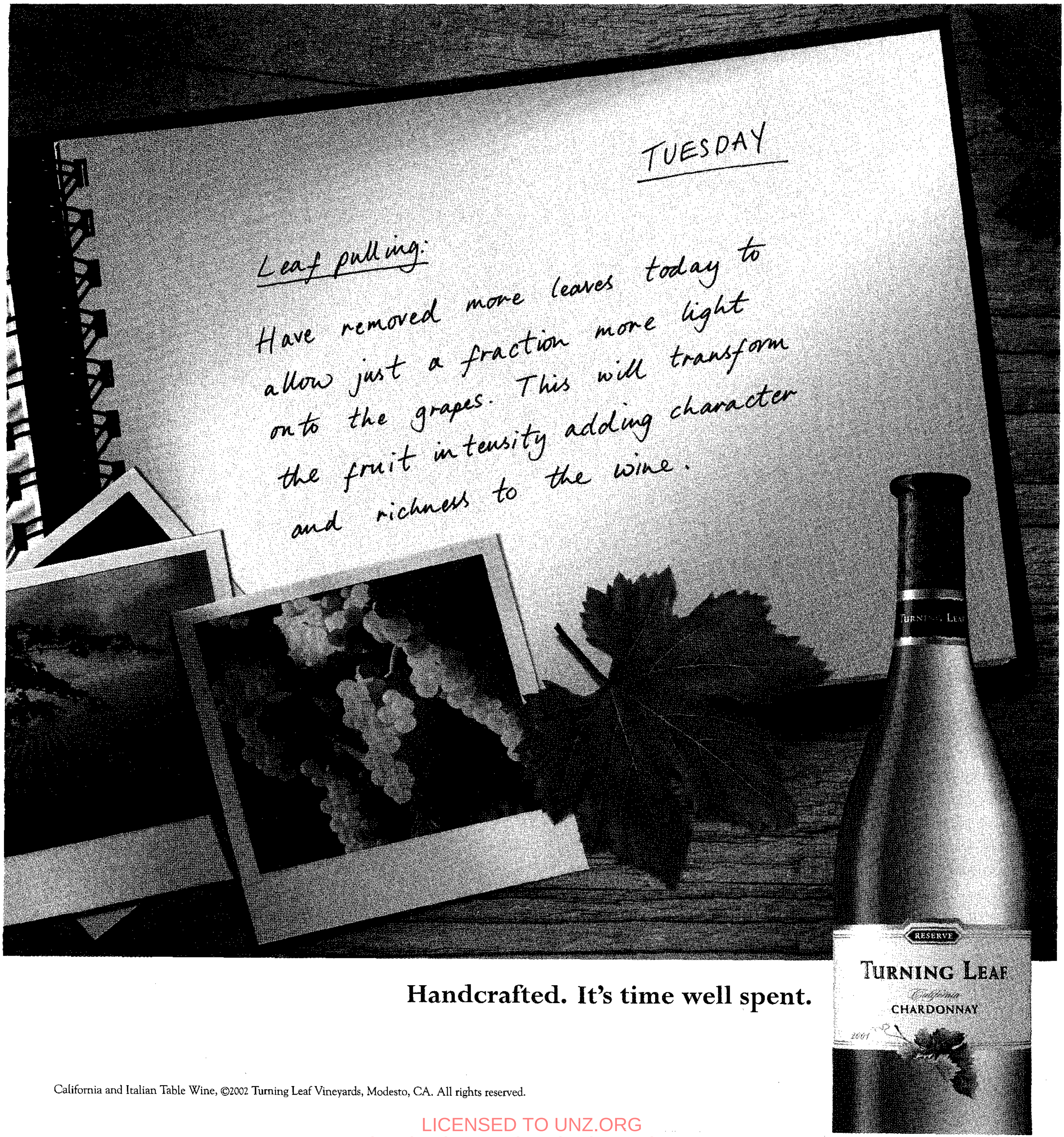
idea of the stream's descent—
which, unlike ours, would always be renewed.

—*Rosanna Warren*

In winemaking as in nature, it's the

smallest details

that make the difference.



TUESDAY

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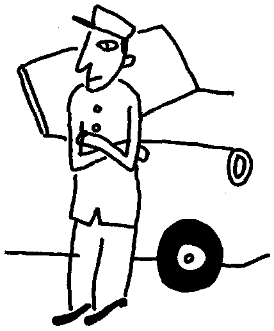
the secret. A lot of cooks don't share their secrets, or more often lie, the way my mother-in-law lied about the proportion of flour to chocolate in her famous "yum-yum cake," thereby ending whatever relationship we had. *My* best secret dates from a dinner party at Gracie Mansion when Ed Koch was the mayor of New York. I had known Koch from his Village Independent Democrat days, when he pretty much starved unless his mother fed him. But now that he was Hizzoner the Mayor of New York City he could, as he repeatedly told his guests, order anything he wanted to eat, no matter what the hour or the season or inconvenience to a staff best trained in trimming the crusts off tea sandwiches. The dinner in question got off to an awkward start—"You're Puerto Rican? You don't *look* Puerto Rican" is how, if I remember correctly, he greeted the beautiful curator of the Museo del Barrio—and it was frequently interrupted by phone calls from his relatives, who seemed to be having some sort of business crisis. But everybody agreed that the food was delicious. It wasn't elaborate food, or even much different from what you'd cook for yourself on a rainy night at home: pasta in a tomato sauce, good steaks, and hot-chocolate sundaes for dessert. But the meal itself was so oddly remarkable that I went back to the kitchen afterward and asked the cook how he'd made it, and he told me, "Whatever Ed likes, whatever he says he never got as a kid, I double the quantity. I doubled the Parmesan on the pasta. I *tripled* the hot-chocolate sauce on the ice cream." Ed's principle was "More is more."

It's not a principle I would apply to writing, but it's definitely the one I cook by now, on my way from excess in the kitchen to a manuscript where less is more. If my couscous is now the best couscous on the Upper West Side, it's because, with a nod to Ed, I take my favorite ingredients from every couscous I've ever eaten—the chickpeas and raisins and turnips and carrots and almonds and prunes—double the quantity, toss them into the broth, and then go back to my desk and cut some adverbs. I put too many eggs in my matzo balls, too much basil in my pesto, too much saffron in my paella. I have no patience with the kind of recipe that says "1/4 teaspoon thyme" or "2 ounces chopped pancetta." I drown my carrots in chervil, because I like the way chervil sweetens carrots. I even drown my halibut in chervil, because I like what it does to the reduction of wine and cream in a white fish sauce—though, now that I think of it, when I'm on a bandwagon, when I'm really mad at the world I'm writing about and the people in it, I will usually switch to sorrel.

The first time I cooked halibut on a bed of sorrel, I was in New York, laboring over a long piece about liberation theology in South America and, in particular, about a young priest whose parish was in a favela with the unlikely name of Campos Elísios, about an hour north of Rio de Janeiro. I wasn't mad at my Brazilian priest—I loved the priest. I was mad at the Bishop of Rio, who was on the priest's back for ignoring orders to keep his parishioners out of politics. At first, I thought I could solve the problem by taking the afternoon off to make *moqueca*, which was not only my favorite Brazilian dish but, in my experience, an immensely soothing one—a gratin of rice, shrimp, lime, and coconut cream, served with (and this is essential, if you're serious) a sprinkling of toasted manioc flour—which provides the comforts of a *brandade* without the terrible nursery taste of cod and potatoes mushed together. I made *moqueca* a lot in Rio, because I was angry a lot in Rio. Angry at the poverty, at the politics, at the easy brutality of people in power and the desperate brutality of people without it. But it's hard to make my *moqueca* in New York unless you have a source of manioc flour, and the closest I came to that was the seven-foot-long flexible straw funnel leaning against a beam in my living room—an object devised by the Amerindians, centuries ago, to squeeze the poison out of manioc so that they wouldn't die eating it. I had wasted the better part of the afternoon on Amsterdam Avenue, searching for manioc flour, when I happened to pass a greengrocer with a special on sorrel. I bought him out, and a couple of hours later I discovered that the patient preparation of sorrel—the blanching and chopping and puréeing and braising in butter—had taken the diatribe in my head and turned it into a story I could tell.

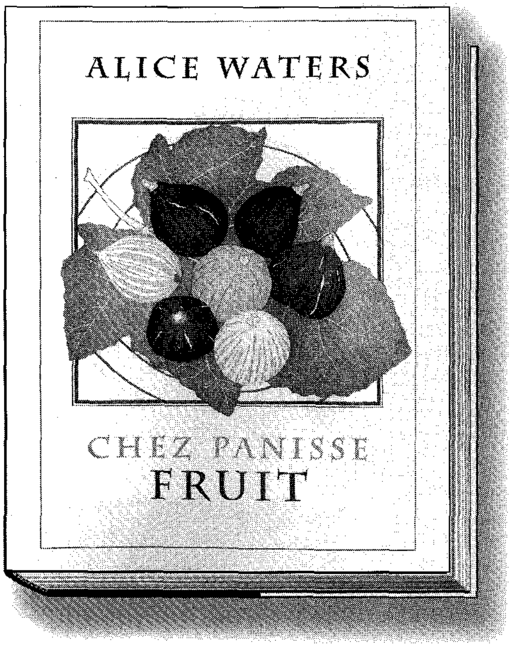


There are, of course, moments in writing when even the most devoted cook stops cooking. Those are the moments that, in sex, are called "transporting" but in journalism are known as an empty fridge, an irritable family, and the beginnings of a first-name friendship with the woman who answers the phone at Empire Szechuan. When I am lost in one of those moments, I subsist on takeout and jasmine tea, or if takeout is truly beyond me—the doorbell, the change, the tip, the mismatched chopsticks, the arguments when I won't share—on chili-lime tortilla chips and Diet Coke. If the hour is decent, I'll mix a Bloody Mary or a *caipirinha* like the ones that the priest and I used to sneak in the kitchen of the parish house of Campos Elísios on evenings when the Seventh-Day Adventists would arrive at the favela in force, pitch a tent in a field, and call the poor to salvation through amps rented by the hour from a Copacabana beach band. But moments like those are rare.

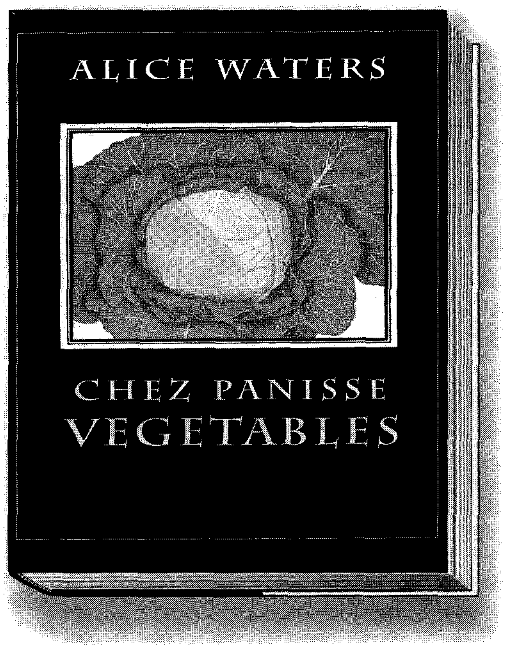
My normal state when beginning a piece is panic, and by now my friends and family are able to gauge that panic by the food I feed them. This past spring, in the course of a few weeks of serious fretting over the lead of a story about an Afghan refugee, I cooked a small Thanksgiving turkey, two Christmas rib roasts, and an Easter lamb. I cooked them with all the fixings, from the corn-bread-and-sausage stuffing to the Yorkshire pudding and horseradish cream—though I stopped short of the Greek Easter cheesecake that three cookbooks assured me had to be made in a clean flowerpot. My excuse was that I'd worked through Thanksgiving and been snowbound in Berlin through Christmas, and, of course, it *was* nearly Easter when I began my holiday cooking. Easter, actually, went well. No one mentioned the fact that we were celebrating it on a Saturday night, or, for that matter, that at noon on Sunday we were due, as always, for our annual Easter lunch at the home of some old friends. But Thanksgiving in April brought strained smiles all around, especially since my next-door neighbor had already cooked a lovely Thanksgiving dinner for me in February. And while my first Christmas was a big success—one of the guests brought presents and a box of chocolate mushrooms left over from a *bûche de Noël*—my second Christmas, a few days later, ended badly, when my daughter suggested that I "see someone" to discuss my block, my husband announced to a room full of people that I was "poisoning" him with saturated fats, and my son-in-law accused me of neglecting the dog. But I did end up with a paragraph. In fact, I thought it was a pretty good paragraph. And I finished the piece the way I usually finish pieces, with notes and cookbooks piled on the floor, working for a few hours, sorting the Post-its on my desk into meaningless, neat stacks, and then heading for my big stove to do more cooking—in this case, to add the tomatoes to a Bolognese sauce, because my last paragraph was too tricky to handle without a slow, comfortable Italian sauce, and I'd been using Bolognese for tricky characters since I first tackled the subject of François Mitterrand, in a story on his inauguration, in 1981.

It seems to me that there is something very sensible about keeping your memories in the kitchen, with the pots and the spices, especially in New York. They take up no space; they do not crash with your computer; and they collect the voice that you can't quite hear—in tastes and smells and small gestures that, with any luck, will eventually start to sound like you. I'm not in New York right now. The dinner I was cooking twenty-five pages ago—the clam-and-pork stew with plenty of garlic and *piri-piri* that I first ate in a Portuguese fishermen's tavern near Salem, the day I tacked wrong and sailed my boyfriend's sixteen-footer into a very big ketch and broke his mast and, with it, whatever interest he had in me—is not the dinner I am cooking today, at a farmhouse in Umbria. My stove is smaller here (though my pots are bigger). I do not write easily about myself. I am not as tasty or exotic as the characters I usually choose. My first attempt at anything like autobiography was a thinly disguised short story, and it was returned with the gentle suggestion that I replace myself with someone "a little less like the kind of person we know everything about already." But twenty years later I did manage to produce a reminiscence of sorts. It was about my mother and my daughter and about being a feminist, and it ended where I am writing now, in Umbria, looking across a pond to a field of wheat and watching a family of pheasants cross my garden. It occurred to me, worrying over *this* ending—not quite a panic but enough of a problem to have already produced a Sardinian saffron-and-sausage pasta, a cold pepper soup with garlic croutons, nightly platters of chicken-liver-and-anchovy *bruschetta*, pressed through my grandmother's hand mill, and twenty jars of brandied apricot jam—that I might possibly solve the problem by cooking the same dinner that I'd cooked then. It turns out to be one meal I can't remember. ◆

ENJOY THE SEASON WITH. . .



Sweet and savory recipes from award-winning chef Alice Waters and the cooks of Chez Panisse.



"Chez Panisse is the single best restaurant in the United States."
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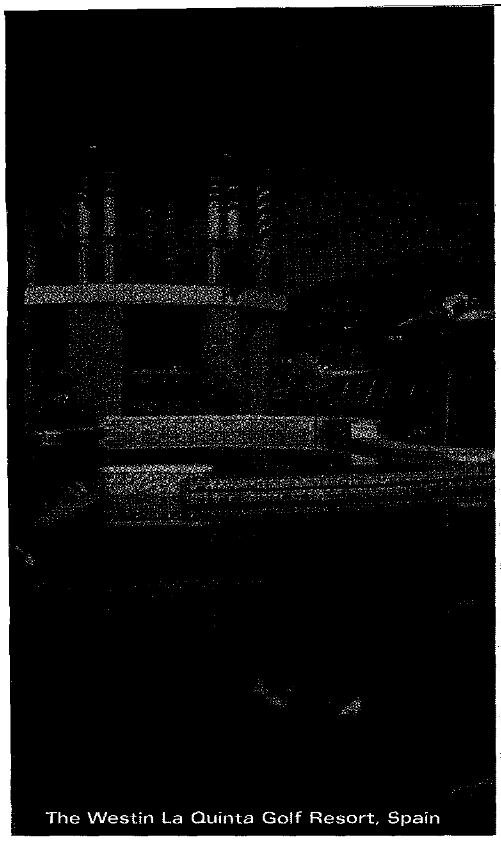
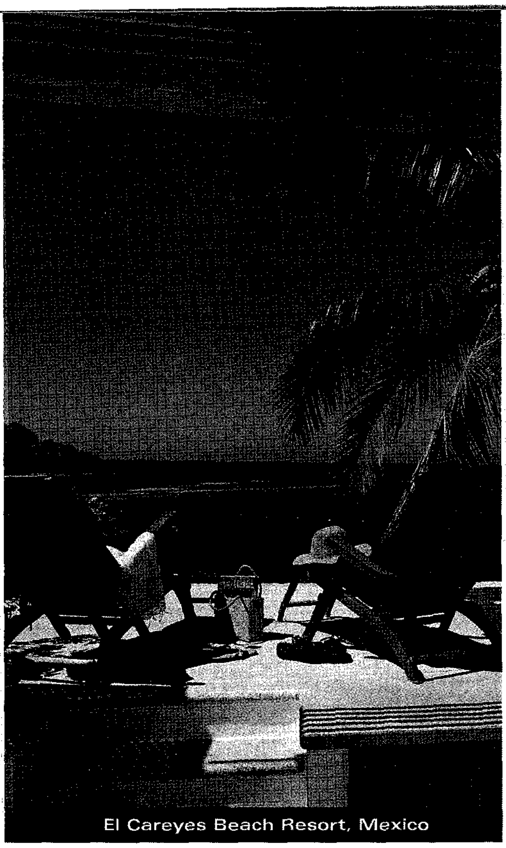
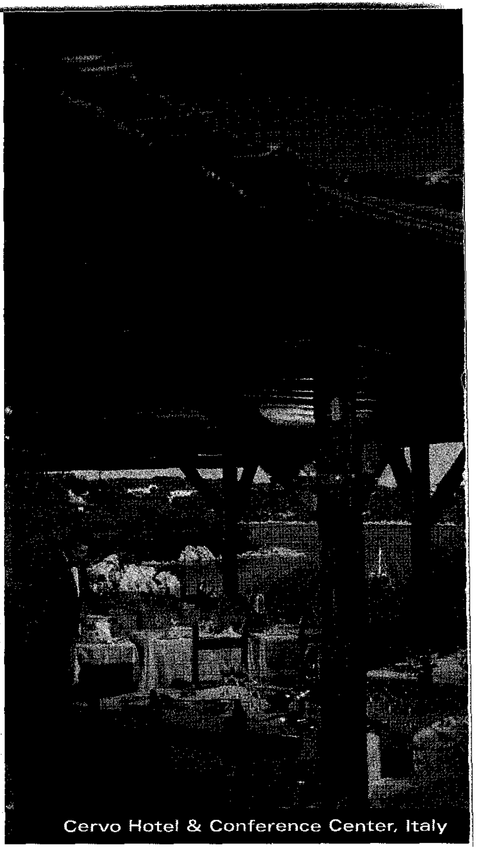


The Westin La Quinta Golf Resort, Spain



El Careyes Beach Resort, Mexico



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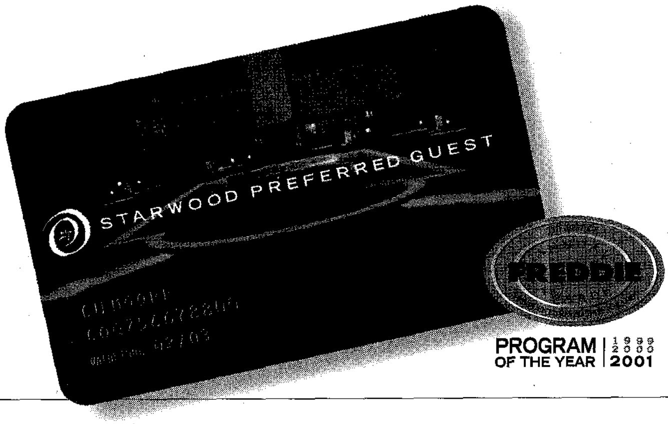

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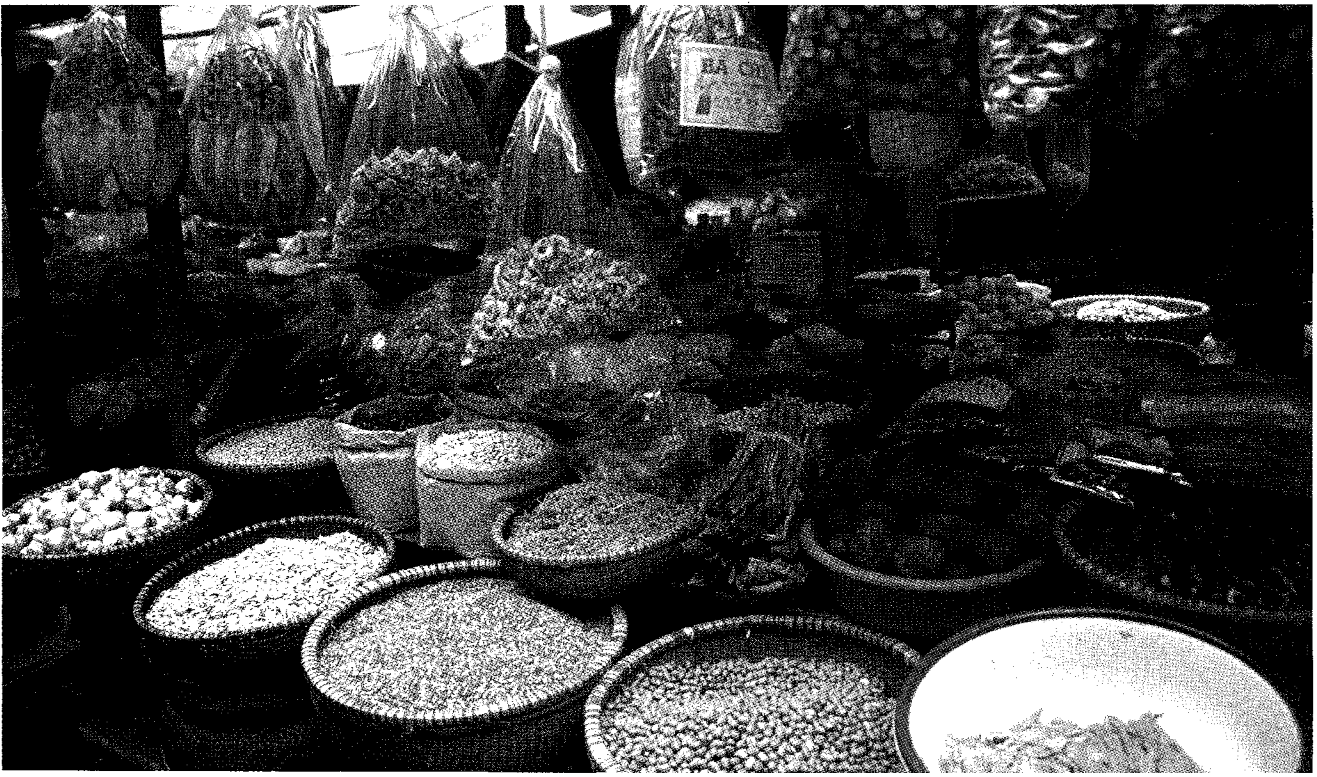
An inveterate gourmand, I find it delicious before setting out on a journey to anticipate what lies ahead. I savor fantasies of tender dumplings stuffed with plump shrimp, warm tortillas cradling charred pork smothered in spicy salsa, or handmade pasta with an herb-fragrant sauce. These are the lures of epicurean travel, and I'll admit that I'm hooked. This year's hottest destinations give the imagination even more to work with because they are at the historical crossroads of many cultures and cuisines.

To take one tony example: the tiny volcanic island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, five hundred miles east of Madagascar. These days, it's getting a lot of buzz—not only for its sparkling white beaches and ultra-glamorous resorts such as Le Saint Géran, but also for its potpourri of French, African, Indian, and Chinese influenced fare. In Mauritius, sybarites can breakfast on croissants, snack on samosas, and lunch on stir-fry. And for dinner, they can luxuriate in the multiethnic menu at Alain Ducasse's Spoon des Îles at Le Saint Géran, where tropical fruits, curries, and noodles or fried rice present a succulent backdrop for local seafood in this French-inspired culinary idyll.

BY NAO HAUSER

FORKS IN THE ROAD



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CULINARY AUTHENTICITY

The diversity of ingredients on display at open-air markets tempt travellers to partake of a region's cuisine.

SAVORING SICILY

Famous for its ancient ruins, sun-drenched harvests, and spectacular seaside scenery, Sicily is now drawing foodies to a cuisine that reflects Greek, Arab, Norman, and Bourbon influences. As compared with Tuscany, Sicilian food "has more zing and vibrancy," says cookbook author Nancy Harmon Jenkins whose latest "Essential Mediterranean" (HarperCollins), will be out next spring. Extolling the virtues of Sicily's sunny ingredients, Jenkins waxes euphoric: "The lemons, the ripe vegetables, the wonderful olive oil—the flavors are so intense." Her don't-miss destinations for travellers include the vast, old-fashioned market in Catania; the green countryside around Ragusa, where grazing cows yield the rich, flavorful milk that distinguishes *caciocavallo* Ragusano cheese; and Palermo, for its street food like deep-fried *arancini* (meat- and cheese-filled rice balls) and *sfincione* (thick, sauce-laden pizza). Etched in her memory is Erice, a place once sacred to the Phoenicians, where, amid stunning mountaintop views of the sea, you can savor the couscous introduced by the Arabs.

ROAD SCHOLARS

While a standard guidebook is arguably as elemental as a passport when venturing into unfamiliar territory, an evocative travelogue can enhance the experience all the more. Oliver Sacks, neurologist and author of "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat," depicts a Mexico radically different from the one in standard accounts. In his **Oaxaca Journal** (National Geographic Directions, 2002), we meet various fern fanatics and experience a landscape as fractured as any in a W.G. Sebald novel. Peter Mayle's **French Lessons** (Vintage, 2001) and Mort Rosenblum's **A Goose in Toulouse and Other Culinary Adventures in France** (North Point Press, 2000) allow us to imbibe a France of quirky villages, odd trends and, as always, transcendent cuisine. Chris Stewart's **Driving Over Lemons: An Optimist in Spain** (Vintage, 1999) is an uproarious account of an Englishman's life on an isolated farm in Southern Spain. Tim Cahill's humorous **Road Fever** (Vintage, 1991), in contrast, relives a wild-eyed, fifteen-thousand-mile road trip from South America's Tierra del Fuego to Alaska's Prudhoe Bay. A seeming trend: marquee writers on various destinations. Look for poet W. S. Merwin's **The Mays of Ventadorn** (National Geographic Directions, 2002) on Southern France; Pulitzer-winning novelist Michael Cunningham's **Land's End** (Crown, 2002) on Provincetown; novelist and short story writer Edwidge Danticat's **After the Dance** (Crown, 2002) on her native Haiti. Nor should Alain de Botton, author of "How Proust Can Change Your Life" be overlooked. He weighs in with **The Art of Travel** (Pantheon Books, 2002), a musing on the joys and tribulations encountered by all those who travel. *–Meakin Armstrong*

Insets: courtesy of Italian Government Tourist Board; right, © David Lees/CORBIS

HARVEST ALL'ITALIANA

Succulent olives from the groves of the Puglia region are ready to be cleaned and processed. *(Insets)* Sicilian scenery.

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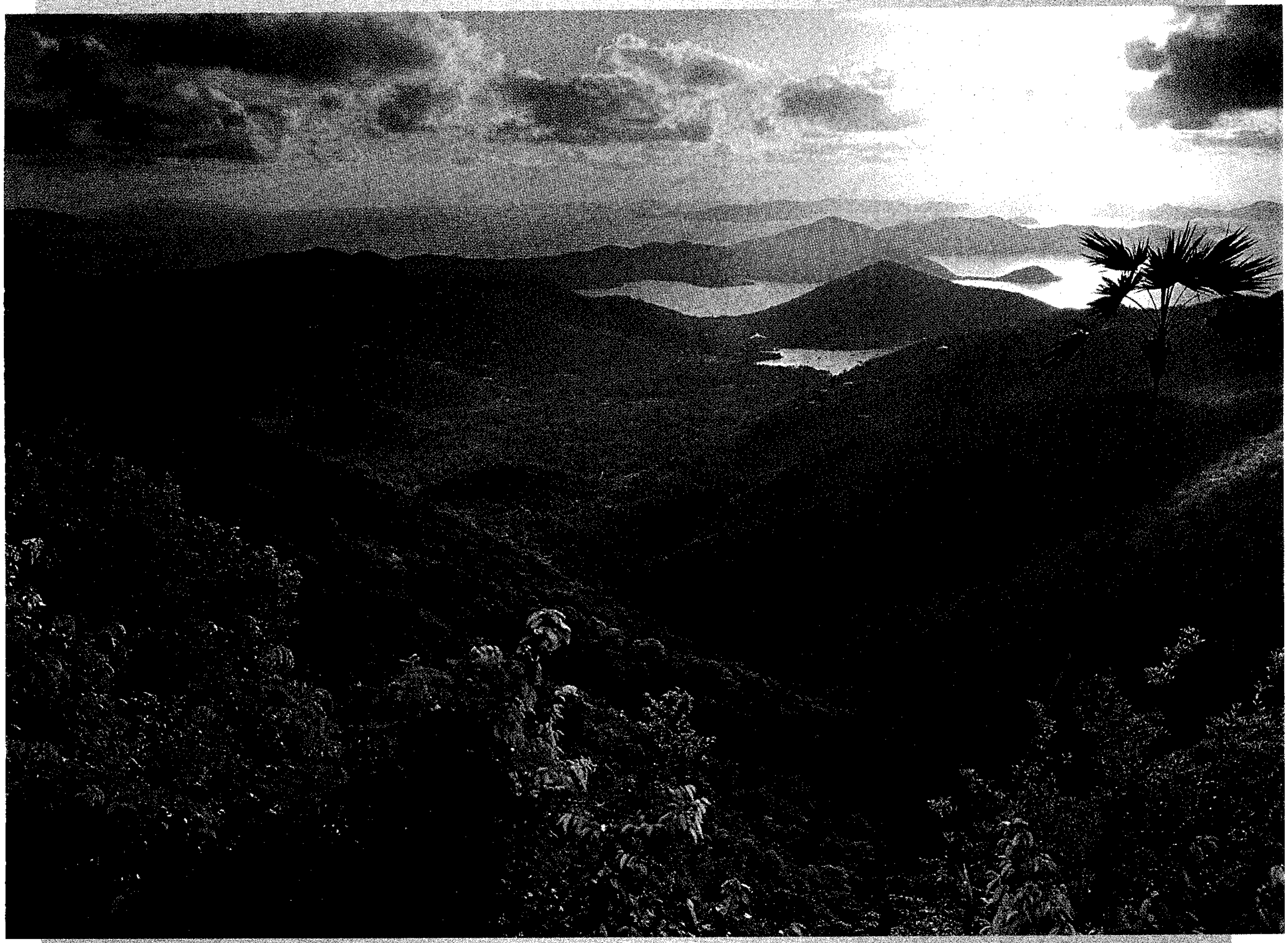

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ACCENT ON ASIA

When she returns to Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), where she was born, Mai Pham notices at once that she is at a culinary crossroads. "Between breakfast and lunch I cross between India and China," observes Pham, owner of the Lemon Tree restaurant in Sacramento, California. She starts the day with sticky rice with mung bean paste and coconut. "It's the most wonderful thing to eat for breakfast," she avows. Later, at noon, she stops by a street vendor for a lunch of rice paper-wrapped salad rolls filled with sauteed jicama, Chinese sausage, and black bean sauce. For dinner Pham sometimes partakes of the beautiful, meticulously arranged cuisine of the Imperial Hue empire at one of the local restaurants that feature it. She urges visitors to do likewise, either in Ho Chi Minh City or in the ancient capital of Hue itself.

© Mai Pham

GOOD AFTERNOON, VIETNAM

Cha ca (grilled fish) is a Hanoi specialty served with fresh dill, peanuts, and dipping sauce.

The speed of culinary recovery in Hanoi astonished Pham when she visited there last year. The ancient city of magical mountains, centuries-old Buddhist temples, and French colonial architecture now features no less than two dozen gourmet restaurants and thousands of sidewalk cafés. "We're seeing the renaissance of cooking traditions," notes Pham. Two of her favorite restaurants are Indochine for crab in tamarind sauce and Nam Phuong for "the most delicious pork cooked in coconut juice." Author of "Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table" (HarperCollins, 2001), Pham will lead a Culinary Institute of America-sponsored trip to Southeast Asia from January 4–13, 2003.

Bangkok is to Southeast Asia what Paris is to Europe, says Steve Dolinsky, host and producer of "Good Eating," the award-winning Chicago TV show. "There is great food everywhere," he proclaims, fondly recalling an amazing meal he enjoyed at the Imperial Impala Hotel. One of his principal pleasures was purchasing deliciously varied tropical fruits at the floating and weekend markets. "Give me *rambutan!* Give me *pomelo!* Give me *durian!*" says Dolinsky, who also couldn't get enough of the *pad Thai* and *som tum* (green papaya salad) sold in the streets. Fresh seasonings gave them a nuanced harmony that was incredibly exciting, he maintains.

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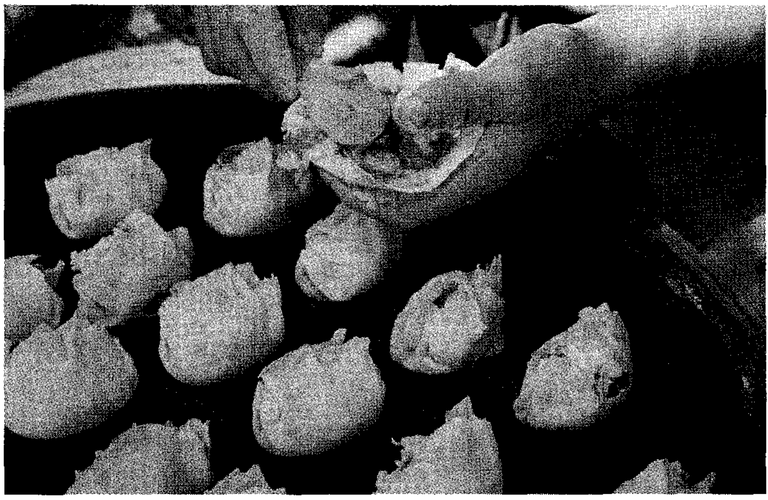
Dolinsky suggests a brief stay at The Regent Hotel in Chiang Mai, Thailand's second-largest city. It's well worth the detour because the cuisine is different in the north, advises Dolinsky. Two Chiang Mai specialties he recommends are the spicy sausages sold by street vendors and *kao soi*, an opulent Northern Thai curried chicken and coconut milk noodle dish.

CHINA PALATE

Exploring the exotic cuisines of China "has long been a dream" for Arun Sampanthavivat, whose Chicago Thai restaurant, Arun's, has been called "America's best" by celebrated chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. Over the past two years, Sampanthavivat has made three visits to China, indulging his passions not only for succulent food but also for Chinese opera and antiques. In Shanghai he feasted on the traditional northern dish of pork braised with honey, soy, and star anise. Beijing offered exquisite dumplings at numerous sidewalk shops. In Hangzhou he relished freshwater fish while gazing at the beautiful lake they had just been extracted from. Much to his surprise, he found the Chinese food in Singapore, where he spent ten days cooking in the Club Chinois kitchen as a participant in the 2001 World Gourmet Summit, to be the most refined. As for Hong Kong, Sampanthavivat loved everything, including "all kinds of weird things" that he devoured. Hong Kong is a city, he notes, where "the chefs have rare technical skills, because they've learned from the West and been influenced by cuisines from all over the world." The duck, steamed fish, and barbecued pork in Hong Kong were superb, he says, but above all the noodle dishes really stood out. "I'd go back just for that," says Sampanthavivat. "Hong Kong is a paradise for noodles."



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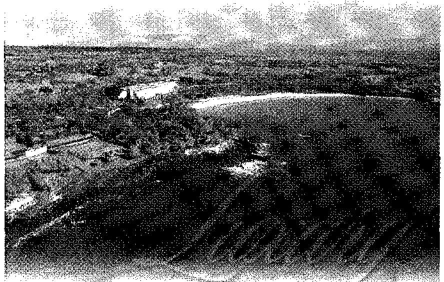
ARTFUL DELICACIES

Chinese dumplings being prepared for a Xinjiang market.

LATINO MARINADE

The popularity of ceviche, *caipirinhas*, and tamales on pan-Latino menus worldwide has raised the profile of South America's great cuisines. These specialties will appear on the menu along with those of Spain and Mexico at The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone's annual Worlds of Flavors, a conference and festival for food professionals.

Travellers seeking to reap the gustatory riches of South America should start in the Peruvian capitol, according to Maricel Presilla, who owns Zafra, a pan-Latino restaurant in Hoboken, New Jersey. Presilla, whose comprehensive Latin American cookbook will be launched by W. W. Norton next year, reports that Lima is the best place to sample the banquet of flavors created when the Spanish conquistadores met up with the Incan Empire.



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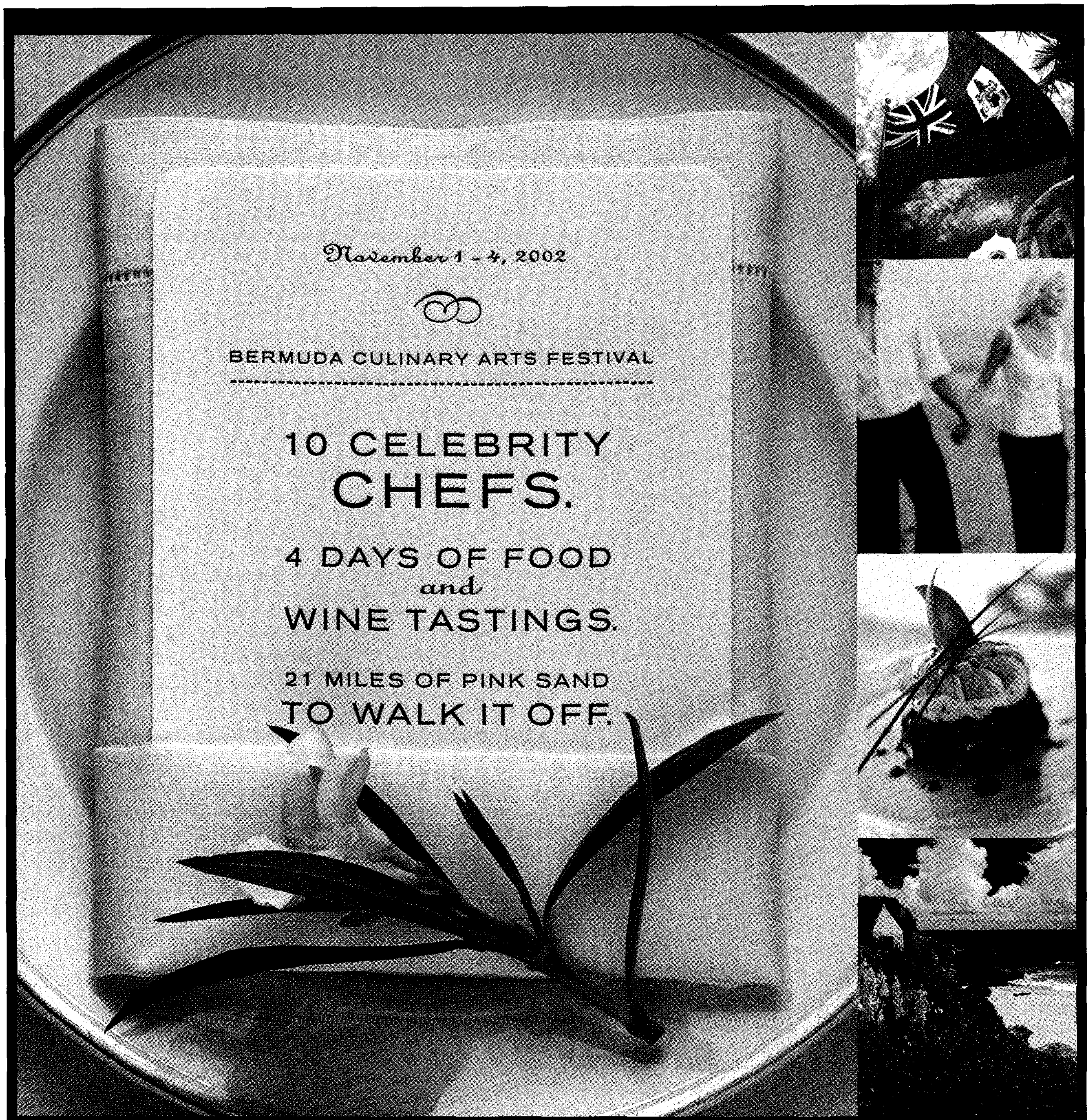

Food lovers rejoice. November 1 through 4, join hosts Executive Chef Sara Moulton and Wine Consultant Michael Green, both of Gourmet magazine. Meet world-renowned chefs including—Jean Francois Bruel of DB Bistro Moderne, New York, Jody Adams of Rialto, Boston, and Matthew Harris of Bibendum, London. Packages start from $1599.50 pp. Call 1-800-Bermuda or your travel professional.

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Miraflores, a posh Lima neighborhood, is a haven in which to sample "the thrilling freshness of the ceviche," says Presilla, who exults in the dish's delicious anointment with genuine key limes. Peruvian regional dishes can be savored in working-class restaurants in the city's historic center, where on almost every corner, food stands with succulent tamales and snacks of big-kernel Andean corn await.

In Brazil, where Portugal once ruled, Presilla touts São Paulo. "Go to the markets and the neighborhood street fairs," she advises. Snack on *pamonhas*, the blistered, flaky pastries filled with meat or cheese. For memorable feasts she suggests the local *rodizios*—barbecue eateries unique to Brazil, where high-quality, grass-fed beef is divinely slow-braised over charcoal flames. Try the Baby Beef Rubaiyat, recommends Presilla, adding that rodizios also have "salad bars beyond belief." Another essential destination is Bahia, in northeast Brazil, where *dendê* oil and coconut milk were stirred by Africans into the Brazilian culinary mix. Wonderful fritters and excellent sea food can be enjoyed at the ubiquitous street-side stands. In Bahia, "It's all about the street food," says Presilla.

Mexico has Spanish-influenced food to rival Peru's, and for those in search of Mexico's traditional heartland, Culinary Adventures is offering expertly guided tours to Oaxaca with author and Chicago restaurateur Rick Bayless. For a focus on chocolate, author Elaine Gonzales will lead a special tour to Oaxaca and Tabasco. (Tour details are at marilyntausend.com.) New York restaurateur and PBS series host Zarela Martinez recommends a Mexican trip to the Gulf Coast region of Veracruz, where a vibrant restaurant culture awaits. This is "joyous Mexico," she says, "where people go out to have fun and you can eat seafood prepared a thousand ways." The city's culinary history can be found in her latest book, "Zarela's Veracruz" (Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

© Luana Wheatley/USVI

PUCKER UP

The tangy flesh from the fruit of tamarind trees, which grows along roadsides in the U.S. Virgin Islands, is used in stews and chutney.

CULINARY CROSSROADS

The world's most varied epicurean landscape may be that of the United States, a view affirmed last November with the opening of a dramatic eighty-thousand-square-foot food museum in Napa, California. Copia: The American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts offers a major, long-term exhibit that sets out what it calls "the whole buffet table" of our country's cuisines, food philosophies, trends, and culinary history. With acres of gardens and Julia's Kitchen, a popular restaurant, Copia provides a splendid gateway to Napa Valley's vineyards and restaurants.

Those who love California wines will want to take note of the tenth-anniversary Winter Wine Escape at the Mauna Kea and Hapuna Beach resorts on the Big Island of Hawaii. Fifty vintners from around the world, including at least a dozen Californians, will converge for the three-day festival (November 14–16). Themes ranging from organic wine-making to favorite varietals will be discussed, and chefs will be cooking up everything from native Hawaiian to nuevo Latino. The festival will take place against the exquisite backdrop of the Kohala Coast's pristine beaches and star-studded skies, and distinguished guest chefs Dominique Tougne (Bistro 110 in Chicago) and Tom Colicchio (Gramercy Tavern and Craft in New York) will bring more than a soupçon of glamour to the occasion. (Visit winter-wineescape.com for details.)

The crossroads of all crossroads has to be New York City, so it's an apt site to showcase America's outstanding dish—a superb beefsteak dry-aged to perfection and cooked over an open grill. The place to go for that sizzling treat is the Bull and Bear steakhouse at the Waldorf-Astoria. It just doesn't get any juicier than this, particularly with Prime-grade, Certified Angus Beef in short supply and not available anywhere else on the eastern seaboard. For those who prefer something lighter, Chef Eric Kaplan brings cuisines of the world to the table, with summer entrée salads of lobster with mango, avocado, and corn, or Asian-style grilled chicken with delicate rice noodles.

ISLAND SIZZLE

Bermuda is the paradisiacal crossroads of great cooking during the Bermuda Culinary Arts Festival, November 1–4. The lineup of a dozen guest chefs is absolutely stellar—including Jody Adams of Rialto in Boston, Guillermo Pernot of Pasion! in Philadelphia, Jean-Francois Bruel of db bistro moderne in New York City, and Jeff Tunks of DC Coast in Washington, D.C. There will be receptions and demonstrations hosted by the Food Network's Sara Moulton as well as gourmet lunches and vintner dinners prepared by the chefs. And, yes, between meals there are those world-famous beaches and golf courses.

Starting next summer, Norwegian Cruise Lines is making New York the point of departure for its brand-new ship, The Norwegian Dawn. Thanks to the latest ship technology, the Dawn will be able to offer an unprecedented round-trip voyage from New York to the Bahamas, with stops in Florida, in just seven days. Onboard, ten restaurants will present ethnic choices ranging from *trattoria Italiana* to French bistro, from tapas to Thai, from sushi to salsa. So in a single, weeklong odyssey, passengers will find themselves not only en route to the islands, but enjoying a world of repasts along the way.

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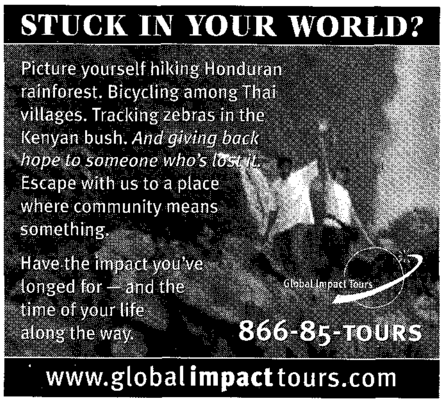
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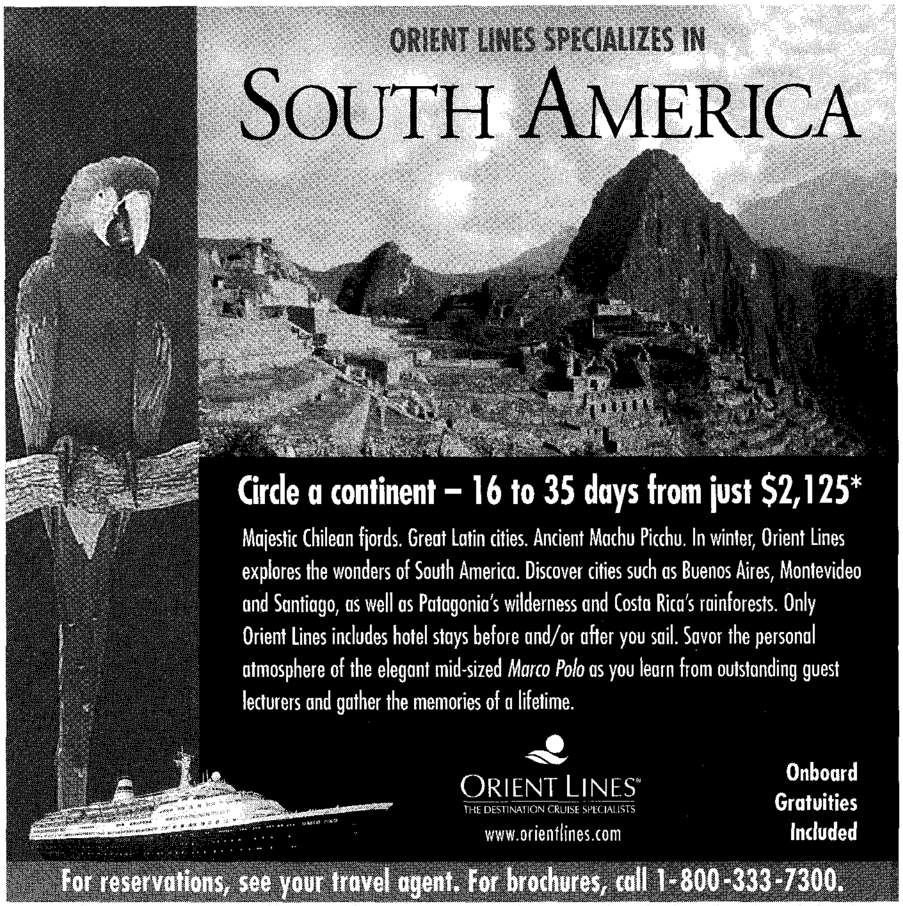
Some of the most diverse dining in the Caribbean can be found in the U. S. Virgin Islands. Traditional fare here merges African, European, and local ingredients and techniques. Food fairs are a major part of the fun at the Islands' main festivals—Carnival on St. Thomas; Crucian Christmas on St. Croix, and July Fourth on St. John. Waistlines are severely challenged by *callalou* (a soup thick with seafood, indigenous greens, and okra); conch fritters; *fungi* (a dish similar to polenta); and a profusion of coconut cakes, cookies, and tarts. The fresh local tuna, wahoo, and mahi, as well as the excellent tropical fruits and vegetables, become elements of creativity in the hands of extraordinary chefs like Aaron Willis, a native who presides over the Fish Trap and the Stone Terrace in St. John. Willis's serene sense of place is gracefully expressed in culinary combinations such as macadamia and tamarind-encrusted pork on mashed plantains, and charcoal grilled tuna with a soy glaze and wasabi mayonnaise. It's a style he calls "island imaginings." As a chef who grew up on the island, went to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, and apprenticed in California before returning to his roots, Willis proclaims that his ambition is "to bring home the rest of the world."

(New York-based Nao Hauser is a freelance writer, editor, and consultant who contributes regularly to Bon Appétit.)

NEWS BRIEFS

LONDON Giorgio Locatelli, one of Britain's best Italian chefs, recently opened Locanda Locatelli at the Churchill Inter-Continental London, a short tube ride from ever popular boutique hotel ***Number Sixteen***. . . . ***Home From Home*** offers two short-term rentals in Bankside Lofts along the Thames near ***Le Pont de la Tour***, where the Blairs dined the Clintons. FRANCE Fine dining guaranteed: A ***Cross-Culture*** cuisinier leads a series of tours in the south of France, through Provence, Dordogne, and Albigeois. SPAIN Spend a weekend in Barcelona before taking the train down to Valencia for six days of cooking classes and visits to a pottery factory, an olive oil plant, and two wineries with Chef John Wilson and ***Culinary Vacations***. Basque delicacies prepared by an all-male private gastronomic society in San Sebastián is an exclusive feature of ***Cobblestone Small Group Tours'*** two fall wine/food trips. ITALY Tasty Tuscan cuisine is a bonus at a ***LaCURE*** private villa in Tuscany that's staffed by a chef who uses fresh local ingredients to prepare meals tailored to patrons' tastes. . . . Master chef Angelo Chiavaroli reveals his gourmet secrets at the Pettirosso Cooking School in the Abruzzo region. ***The Parker Company*** itinerary includes lodging at the chef's four-star Hotel Montinope, classes in the Pettirosso Restaurant kitchen, and visits to local markets, olive groves, wineries, and *pastifici* (pasta factories). TURKEY Stopovers at selective restaurants serving regional fare like *pilav* (a rice dish), kebob, *kofte* (meatballs), and *borek* (rolled pastry) enrich ***Peten Travels'*** archeology, art, history, and culture tours. CHILE/ARGENTINA Explore gourmet restaurants and wine cellars with celebrated chef, wine connoisseur, and author John Ash on ***Geographic Expeditions'*** November tour of the two countries. THAILAND Cyclists on ***Global Impact Tours'*** 2003 biking adventure will brake for a cooking class at an Autthaya restaurant and visit a local outdoor produce market in Lampang. BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS Catering to the burgeoning interest in Caribbean cuisine, ***The New England Culinary Institute*** has embarked on a two-year, multimillion-dollar expansion of its chef-training institute at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola. KAUAI, HAWAII Guests flavor their own meals with a choice of forty fresh herbs from ***Poipu Kapili's*** bountiful herb garden. SOUTH CAROLINA Sample the low country's finest food prepared by regional chefs on November 16 when the ***Charleston Entertains Kitchen Tour*** visits the spacious kitchens of six historic houses. NAPLES & MARCO ISLAND, FLORIDA Chefs at new restaurants such as Lemonia, Baleen, Sale e Pepe, and Caxambas are perfecting their recipes for the October stone crab season, while in nearby ***Everglades City***, the stone crab capital of the world, crabbers are gearing up to harvest the succulent claws. NEW YORK CITY The ***Buckingham Hotel*** recommends the nearby chic Italian, ***San Domenico***, to its restaurant-seeking guests. Proprietor Tony May was named Reataurateur of the Year in 2000 by the New York State Restaurant Association. . . . Wall Street Rising, a not-for-profit organization founded by Vine restaurant owner Julie Menin, utilizes five Lower Manhattan buildings (two are landmarks) to present ***Art Downtown***, an exhibition of contemporary artwork through September 15. THE JERSEY SHORE Lobster bisque is the culinary sensation at the new ***Shipwreck Grill*** in Brielle, near ***Sea Crest by the Sea Bed and Breakfast*** in Spring Lake. THE WEB Book a minimum of three nights through ***hotels.com*** by September 15, 2002 with your MasterCard and receive a copy of ZagatSurvey's coveted guide, "America's Best Meal Deals." *—Dan Ouellette*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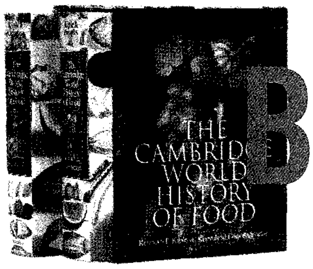

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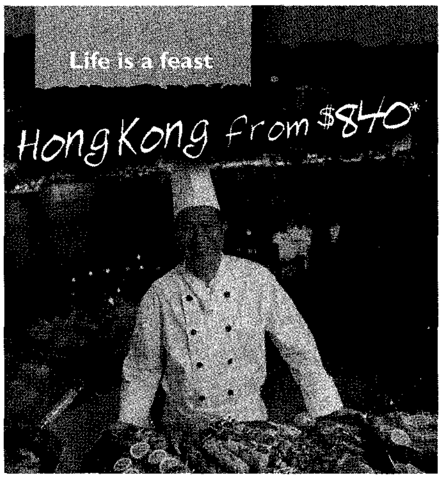

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PROFILES

THE SECRET OF EXCESS

How a life became cooking.

BY BILL BUFORD

The first glimpse I had of what Mario Batali's friends had described to me as the "myth of Mario" was during a weekend in January last year, when I invited him to dinner with some friends. Batali, the chef and co-owner of Babbo, an Italian restaurant in Manhattan, is such a proficient cook that he is rarely invited to people's homes for a meal, and he went out of his way to be a grateful guest. He arrived with a jar of quince-flavored grappa, which he'd made himself (the fruit renders it almost drinkable); a bottle of *nocino*, which he'd also made (same principle, but with walnuts); three bottles of wine; and a white, dense slab of *lardo*—literally, the raw "lardy" back of a very fat pig, which he'd cured with herbs and salt. I was a reasonably comfortable cook, keen but a little chaotic, and I was delighted to have Batali in the kitchen, if only for his pedagogical interventions. He has been cooking for a cable-television audience for more than six years and has an uninhibited way of telling you that only a moron would wrap the meat in foil after cooking it. The evening, by then, had been effectively taken over. Not long into it, Batali had cut very thin slices of the *lardo* and, with a flourish of intimacy, laid them individually on our tongues, whispering that we needed to let the *lardo* melt to appreciate what the pig had eaten just before he died. The pig, evidently, had been five hundred and seventy-five pounds, almost three times the size of a normal pig, and, near the end, had lived exclusively on walnuts, apples, and cream. ("It's the best song sung in the key of pig," Batali said.) No one at dinner that evening had knowingly eaten pure fat before ("At the restaurant, I tell the waiters to call it *prosciutto bianco*, or else people won't touch it"), and by the time he had persuaded us to a third helping my heart was racing and we were all very thirsty.

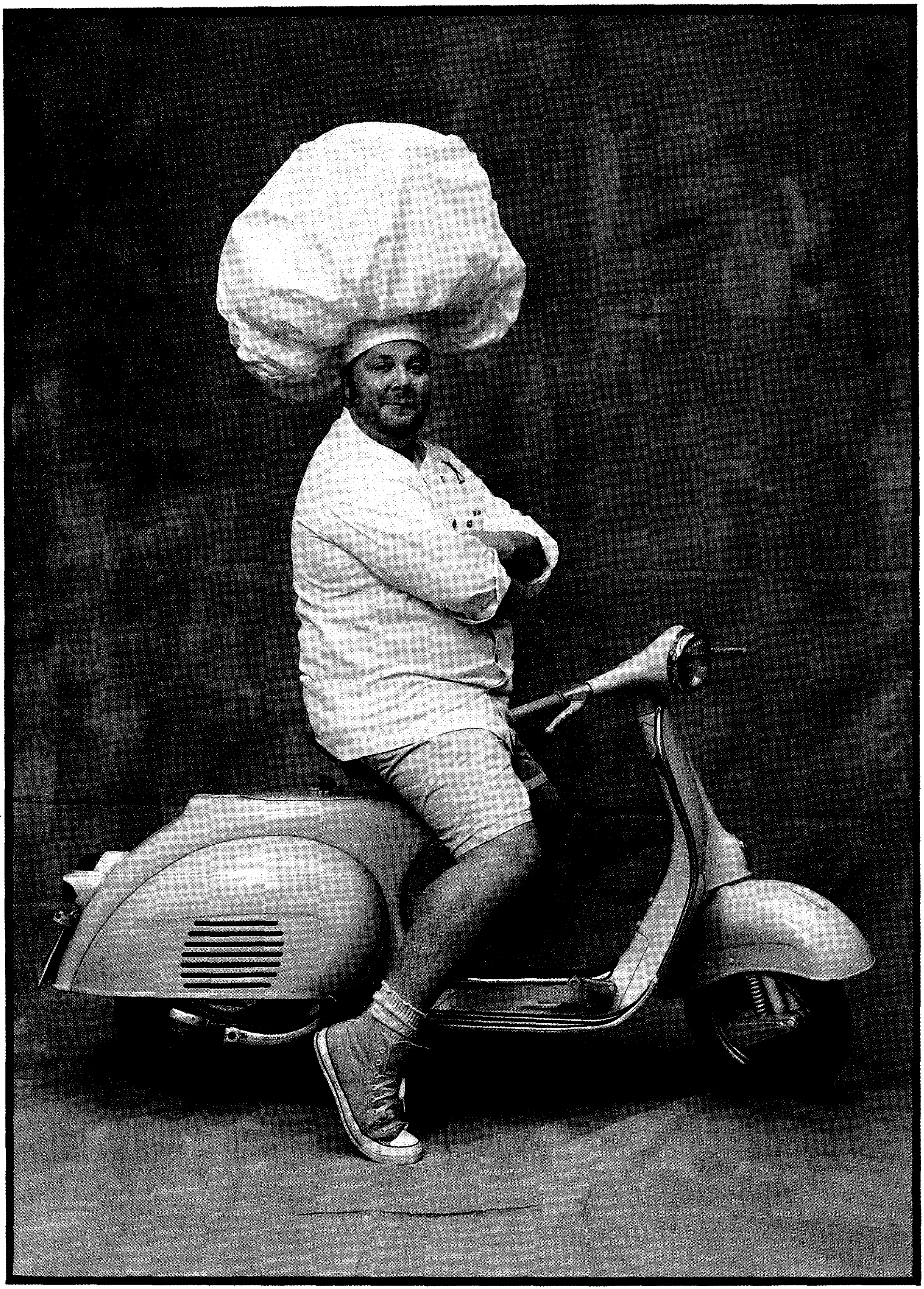
On trips to Italy made with his Babbo co-owner, Joe Bastianich, Batali has been known to share an entire case of wine during dinner, and, while we didn't drink anything like that, we were all infected by his live-very-hard-for-now approach and had more than was sensible. I don't know. I don't really remember. There was also the grappa and the *nocino*, and one of my last recollections is of Batali around three in the morning—back arched, eyes closed, an unlit cigarette dangling from his mouth, his red Converse high-tops pounding the floor—playing air guitar to Neil Young's "Southern Man." Batali had recently turned forty, and I remember thinking that it was a long time since I'd seen a grown man playing air guitar. He then found the soundtrack for "Buena Vista Social Club," tried to salsa with one of the guests (who promptly fell over a sofa), tried to dance with her boyfriend (who was unresponsive), and then put on a Tom Waits CD and sang along as he went into the kitchen, where, with a machinelike speed, he washed the dishes and mopped the floor. He reminded me that we had an arrangement for the next day—he'd got tickets to a New York Giants game, courtesy of the commissioner of the N.F.L., who had just eaten at Babbo—and disappeared with three of my friends. They ended up at Marylou's, in the Village—in Batali's description, "a wise-guy joint where you get anything at any time of night, none of it good."

It was nearly daylight when he got home, the doorman of his apartment building told me the next day as the two of us tried to get Batali to wake up: the N.F.L. commissioner's driver was waiting outside. When Batali was roused, forty-five minutes later, he was momentarily perplexed, standing in his doorway in his underwear and wondering why I was there. Batali has a remarkable girth, and it was a little startling to see him so clad, but within minutes he had transformed himself into the famous television chef: shorts, high-tops, sunglasses, his red hair pulled back into a ponytail. He had become Molto Mario—the many-layered name of his cooking program, which, in one of its senses, means, literally, Very Mario (that is, an intensified Mario, an exaggerated Mario, and an utterly over-the-top Mario)—and a figure whose renown I didn't fully appreciate until, as guests of the commissioner, we were allowed on the field before the game. Fans of the New York Giants are happy caricatures (the ethic is old-fashioned blue-collar, even if they're corporate managers), and I was surprised by how many of them recognized the ponytailed chef, who stood on the field facing them, arms crossed over his chest, and beaming. "Hey, Molto!" one of them shouted. "What's cooking, Mario?" "Mario, make me a pasta!" On the East Coast, "Molto Mario" is on twice a day (at eleven-thirty in the morning and five-thirty in the afternoon). I had a complex picture of the metropolitan working male—policeman, Con Ed worker, plumber—rushing home to catch lessons in how to braise his broccoli rabe and get just the right forked texture on his homemade orecchiette. (Batali later told me that when the viewing figures for his show first came in they were so overwhelmingly male that the producers thought they weren't going to be able to carry on.) I stood back, with one of the security people, taking in the spectacle (by now a crowd was chanting "Molto! Molto! Molto!")—this proudly round man, whose whole manner said, "Dude, where's the party?"

"I love this guy," the security man said. "Just lookin' at him makes me hungry."

Mario Batali arrived in New York in 1992, when he was thirty-one. He had two hundred dollars, a duffelbag, and a guitar. Since then, he has become the city's most widely recognized chef and, almost single-handedly, has changed the way people think about

RUVEN AFANADOR



Mario Batali has become the city's most widely recognized chef, changing the way people think about Italian cooking in America.

"Listen, buster, I didn't sit on your hard little egg in the blazing sun for six weeks just to hear you say, 'Ewww, I don't like regurgitated yak carcass.'"

Italian cooking in America. The food he prepares at Babbo, which was given three stars by the *Times* when the restaurant opened, in 1998, is characterized by intensity—of ingredients, of flavor—and when people talk of it they use words like "heat" and "vibrancy," "exaggeration" and "surprise." Batali is not thought of as a conventional cook, in the business of serving food for profit; he's in the much murkier enterprise of stimulating outrageous appetites and satisfying them aggressively. (In Batali's language, appetites blur: a pasta made with butter "swells like the lips of a woman aroused," roasted lotus roots are like "sucking the toes of the Shah's mistress," and just about anything powerfully flavored—the first cherries of the season, the first ramps, a cheese from Piedmont—"gives me wood.") Chefs are regular visitors and are subjected to extreme versions of what is already an extreme experience. "We're going to kill him," Batali said to me with maniacal glee as he prepared a meal for Wylie Dufresne, the former chef of 71 Clinton, who had ordered a seven-course tasting menu, to which Batali then added a lethal-seeming number of impossible-to-resist extra courses. The starters (variations, again, in the key of pig) included a plate of *lonza* (the cured backstrap from one of Batali's cream-apple-and-walnut-fattened pigs); a plate of *coppa* (made from the same creamy pig's shoulder); a fried pig foot; a porcini mushroom, stuffed with garlic and thyme, and roasted with a piece of Batali's own *pancetta* (cured pig belly) wrapped around its stem; plus ("just for the hell of it") tagliatelle topped with *guanciale* (cured pig jowls), parsnips, and black truffle. A publisher who was fed by Batali while talking to him about booking a party came away vowing to eat only soft fruit and water until he'd recovered: "This guy knows no middle ground. It's just excess on a level I've never known before—it's food and drink, food and drink, food and drink, until you start to feel as though you're on drugs." This spring, Mario was trying out a new motto, borrowed from the writer Shirley O. Corriher: "Wretched excess is just barely enough."

Batali grew up outside Seattle. His mother, Marilyn, is half French Canadian, half English (it's from her line that Batali gets the flaming-red hair and the fair complexion), and his father, Armandino, a former Boeing executive, is Italian. In 1975, Armandino was posted to Europe, to supervise the procurement of airplane parts made overseas, and moved his family to Spain. Already, Mario was, in the words of his sister Gina, "pushing the limits." For Batali, Madrid, in the years after Franco's death, was a place of exhilarating license: bars with no minimum age, hash hangouts, and flirtations with members of the world's oldest profession. He was caught growing marijuana on the roof of the Madrid apartment building where the family lived, the first incident of what became a theme: Batali was later expelled from his dorm in college, suspected of dealing, and, later still, there was some trouble outside Tijuana, which landed him in jail. (The time in Madrid evokes a memory of one of the first dishes Batali remembers preparing, a late-night panino with caramelized onions, cow's-milk cheese, and paper-thin slices of chorizo: "The best stoner munch you can imagine. Me and my brother Dana were just classic stoner kids, we were so happy.")

When Batali returned to the United States, in 1978, to attend Rutgers University, in New Jersey, he believed that his future was in Iberian finance ("I wanted to be a Spanish banker—I loved the idea of making a lot of money and living a luxurious life in Madrid"), and his improbable double major was business management and Spanish theatre. After being expelled from his dorm, he got work as a dishwasher, at a popular student restaurant called Stuff Yer Face; one can't help feeling that, in the name alone, destiny was calling. Gina Batali agrees—"This is when Mario became Mario"—although the evidence, a photograph of the young chef with an unrecognizably narrow waist, suggests that Mario didn't become Mario for another few inches. Batali was rapidly promoted—to prep cook (preparing the food for the evening chefs), then line cook (working at one "station" in a "line" of stations, making one thing)—and still claims the record for most pizzas made in an hour. The life at Stuff Yer Face was fast, sexy ("The most boooootiful waitresses in town"), and happily recreational. ("I don't want to come off as a big druggie, but a guy would bring a pizza pan turned upside down with lines of crank on it.") And when, in his junior year, he went to a career conference, attended by representatives from major corporations, Batali realized that he would never be a banker. He was going to be a chef.

"I had a natural affinity for the kitchen, and my mother and grandmother had always told me that I should be a cook. In fact, when I was preparing my college applications my mother suggested cooking school, but I said, 'Ma, that's too gay. I don't want to go to cooking school—that's for fags.' " But five years later Batali showed up for his first day at the Cordon Bleu in London.

His father, still working with Boeing, was now based in England. Gina Batali was there, too, and recalls seeing her brother in the early mornings, when he returned after being out all night, having attended classes during the day and then worked at a pub. The pub was the Six Bells, on the King's Road, in Chelsea. Mario was bartending at the "American bar" ("I had no idea what I was doing"), when a high-priced dining room opened in the back, and a chef was hired to run it, a Yorkshireman named Marco Pierre White. Mario quit cooking school, already bored by the pace, and was hired to be the new chef's slave.

Today, Marco Pierre White is regarded as one of the most influential chefs in Britain, and it's an extraordinary fortuity that these two men found themselves working together, both in their early twenties, in a tiny pub kitchen. Batali didn't understand what he was witnessing: his professional experience had been making strombolis in New Brunswick. "I assumed I was seeing what everyone else knew already; I didn't feel like someone on the cusp of a revolution. And yet I could see that this was a guy who really looked at preparing food from outside the box. He was a genius on the plate. I'd never worked on presentation. I just put shit on the plate." He described White making a deep-green basil purée, and a white butter sauce, and swirling the green sauce in one direction and the white sauce in the other, and drawing a swerving line down the middle of the plate. "I had never seen anyone draw fucking lines with two sauces." White would order Batali to follow him to market ("I was his whipping boy. 'Yes, master,' I'd answer. 'Whatever you say' "), and they would return with game birds or ingredients for some of the most improbable dishes ever to be served in an English public house: écrevisses in a reduced lobster sauce, oysters with caviar, and roasted ortolan—the rare and tiny game bird, served virtually breathing, its innards to be gulped down like a raw crustacean.

According to Batali, White was so intuitive and physical that he could do things to food that no one had done before. "He made a hollandaise by beating the sauce so vigorously that it began to froth up and become something else—it was like a sabayon." He was forever chopping things, reducing them, and making Batali force them through a sieve—"which was, of course, no bigger than a tea strainer, because it was a pub and that was all he had, and I'd spend my whole day crushing some chunky shellfish reduction through this tiny thing, ramming it over and over again with a wooden spoon." White is also said to have been spectacularly abusive. "You know, we were just two guys in the kitchen," Batali recalls, "and I'm not cooking the fries right, according to him, or the zucchini, or whatever it was, and he tells me to sauté the snow peas instead, while he's over in the corner doing some dramatic thing with six crayfish, and he suddenly calls out, 'Bring me the snow peas now!' and I duly bring them over. 'Here are the snow peas, master,' but he doesn't like the look of them. 'They are wrong, you moron. They are overcooked, you goddam fucking navvy,' but of course I didn't understand what 'navvy' meant, and I'd say something like 'Navvy this, navvy that, if you don't like my snow peas then make them yourself,' which made him even angrier." Batali says White threw a risotto at him: "He was a mean motherfucker." Batali stuck it out for four months, and then, "frightened for my life," he dumped salt in a beurre blanc and walked out.

Batali is a person of overpowering self-confidence, but in White's kitchen his self-confidence failed him. He would like to dismiss the man, but he can't—after all, White is the person who showed him what a chef could be—and, as a result, White is both wholly loathed by Batali and wholly respected. Even now, nearly twenty years later, you can hear in Batali's account a nagging irritation at his failure to charm or work with someone who understood so much about the potential of food—that "it was a wide-open game." From White, Batali learned the virtues of presentation, stamina, and intense, athletic cooking. And from White he learned a hatred of most things French. (White's pub menu was in French.) He has an injunction against reduced sauces—boiling a liquid like meat broth down to a syrup. ("If you can run your finger through it and an impression is left behind, then it's not me, it's too French.") And a prohibition on tantrums: "It's so old school, so made for the movies." But mainly Batali learned how much he had to learn. Provoked by White's command in the kitchen, he embarked on a grand tour of the grandest restaurants in Europe, tracing White's skills, like someone following a genealogical line, back to their origins: La Tour d'Argent, in Paris; Le Moulin de Mougins, on the Côte d'Azur; the Waterside Inn, outside

London. ("You learn the essentials of a place in a few months. If you want to learn them properly, you stay a year, to cook through the seasons, but I was in a hurry.") At times, he was doing highly tedious tasks (squeezing duck carcasses for twelve hours, to get the extra ounce of juice that went into a duck stock). But he knew the approach was correct. "You learn by working in the kitchen," Batali told me. "Not going to cookery school. That's how it's done."

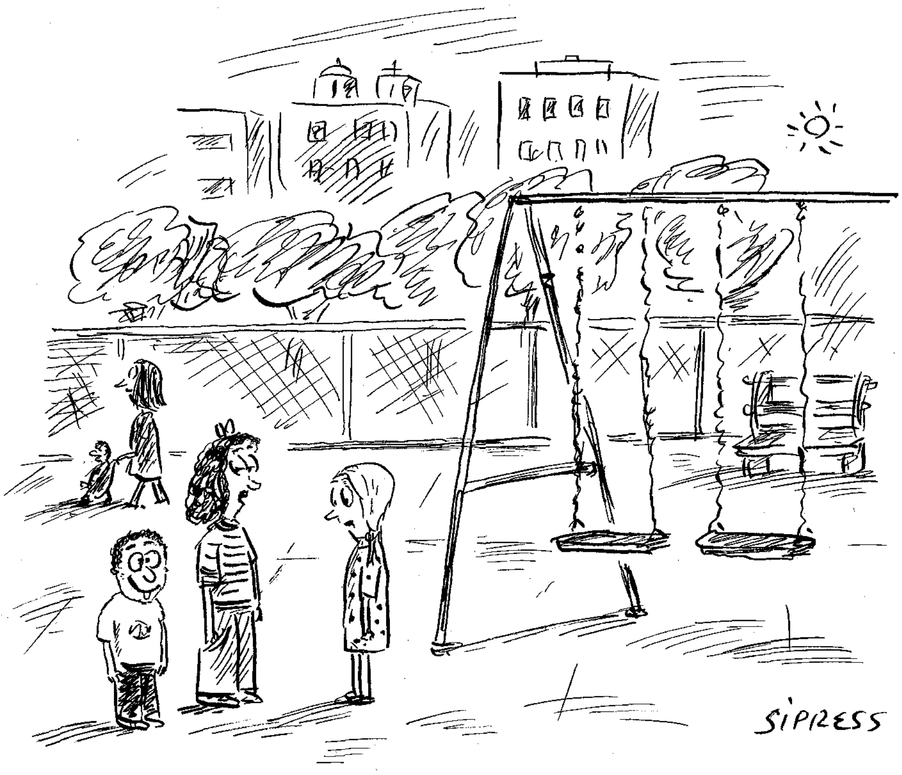
That's what I wanted to do—to work in the Babbo kitchen, as Mario's slave.

I was accepted—Mario told me, after I put the proposal to him—on "a trial basis." He said, "The question is space. Is there room for another body?" There wasn't, but somehow I squeezed in. I would do a night or two "plating pasta," and a day in the "prep kitchen," preparing food for the evening. The prep kitchen was run by Elisa Sarno, and she was expecting me at 7 A.M. But a few days before, on January 26th, I was invited to attend a kitchen meeting.

About twenty people showed up. In April, Mario was publishing "The Babbo Cookbook." The restaurant, he said, was about to come under more scrutiny. There would be television crews, bigger crowds, and restaurant critics, asking if Babbo was as good as it was when it opened, four years earlier. Because the book revealed "all our secrets," the menu would change, and Batali invited people to propose specials ("a classic recipe done in our way") and suggested reading old cookbooks for ideas. He reiterated the kitchen's principles: that we're here "to buy food, fix it up, and sell it at a profit—that's what we do"; that consistency is essential ("If someone has a great dish and returns to have it again, and you don't serve it to him in exactly the same way, then you're a dick"); and that the success of Babbo, "the best Italian restaurant in America," arises out of its style—"More feminine than masculine: people should think there are grandmothers in the back, preparing their dinner."

There was a labor issue—kitchen rage. A chef had just left because he couldn't control his temper. He banged pots, threw utensils, "poisoned the kitchen with his anger." The behavior wasn't to be tolerated. But implicit in the discussion was an acknowledgment of the extreme stress of being a cook during the dinner service.

When I presented myself to Elisa, a handsome, athletic woman in her forties, whom I'd met before, and liked, she didn't seem all that happy to see me. I discovered that I was witnessing her kitchen personality—a tough, no-nonsense brusqueness—developed in part because she was a woman of authority dealing with men rarely prepared to cede it to her. She had been at Babbo since it opened, originally working as a line cook, but she hated the pressure and the hours, and was happier here, in what she treated as her own kitchen.



"That's my little brother. He's all messed up on Skittles and Mountain Dew."

I put on an apron and a jacket, and was given a tour. One corner of the kitchen is taken up by the "walk-in"—a refrigerated closet with floor-to-ceiling shelves—and another corner is given over to dishwashing. Pots, pans, and various plastic containers are stored overhead. Elisa was describing each one according to its size, but I was distracted by the dishwasher, who was assaulting a giant pot with a high-pressure gadget that was spraying water powerfully, in unpredictable directions. "These are the one-quarts," she said, "and here are the two-quarts, four-quarts, six-quarts, and eight, all with their own color-coded lids; hotel pans and half-hotels are there, along with the sheet trays and half-sheet trays." The containers, I learned, were the medium of the prep kitchen—everything went into them so that it could be fetched in the evening—and great weight was expressed in questions like: Is this (chicken feet, say, or a quantity of beef cheeks) to be put in a six-quart or will it fit into a four? I was wondering is this what you learn in cooking school, what a hotel pan is, when Elisa stopped, suddenly realizing that I wasn't carrying any knives. "Where did you put your knives?" she asked.

"My knives?"

"You don't have knives?"

"I'm meant to have knives?"

"Oh, my God. O.K. Bring them next week." And then she muttered to herself, "God, I hate lending people my knives."

She led me into the walk-in, talking fast now, wanting to get on with her day. "This is where we put stuff for the grilling station"—she pointed to a shelf packed with green-lidded containers, indistinguishable from a dozen other shelves with green-lidded containers. "This is the pasta shelf. This is the pantry shelf. Oh, yes, and this is the masking tape. Everything is labelled and dated. Where's your pen? You didn't bring a pen?"

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Vegetables were in the back. Fish were stacked on the floor in Styrofoam crates, delivered before I arrived, some giant silver Mediterranean thing.

"Time to bone the ducks. Come."

There were three boxes of ducks.

"Wipe the counter, wet a cloth—do you remember where the cloths are? Get a cutting board, an eight-quart and two four-quarts, a hotel pan"—which ones were the hotel pans?—"and parchment paper. You get sheets from the pastry station. The four-quarts will be for the gizzards. Here, take one of my knives. Will you bring your knives next week?"

Yes, yes, of course.

"Unpack the duck from the top, so you don't get blood all over you. Remove the gizzards. They go into a container. Cut off the legs to make a confit, but first chop off the knobby bit at the bottom with a cleaver—use this," she said, handing me a giant tomahawk thing—"and then remove the breast. You do know how to bone a duck, don't you?"

"Well, I think, yes, I do. I mean, I've done it." But when? Was that in 1993?

"And you know about the oyster?"

"The oyster?" I asked, and my mind did a calculation. Duck, an animal with wings: fowl. Oyster, molecular thing without wings: mollusk. Ducks don't have oysters; oysters don't have ducks. "The oyster?" I repeated.

"Yes, it's the nugget of meat you don't want to lose. It's here," she said, swiftly cutting the breast in half and whipping her knife around the thigh. She had an appealingly easy manner with the knife, which seemed to involve no effort, and the meat instantaneously cleaved in two. I was thinking, I want to learn how to do that, and didn't quite get the location of the duck oyster—was it in front of the thigh or behind it?—when she was off; a deliveryman had appeared.

I looked around the kitchen. In front of me was a wall of cookers, with vats of something boiling on top. The pastry chefs were beside me, cutting up pineapples. Behind me, two guys were making pasta. On the floor was a giant mixer, knocking around a mound of dough. It was seven-fifteen in the morning.

I picked up a duck, removed the wings, and hunted around for that oyster. I felt an obligation to honor this bird in my hand, by insuring that its thigh oyster found its way onto the plate. But where was the little fucker?

As I slowly got through my first ducks, I stacked up their parts on my cutting board. The idea was that you should whip through each one, slice, slice, slice, just as Elisa had done—the knife doing that effortless thing, all edge, no pressure, the meat opening up like magic—and drop each bit into its appropriate container. But I wasn't sure I was getting it right. I stacked up the thighs on one corner, hoping to hide my first, hacked-up experiments.

Meanwhile, Elisa was opening boxes. ("Frozen pig cheeks," she was saying to the deliveryman. "Frozen is no good for me.") The deliveryman didn't reply; he was staring at me. ("Did you count these lamb shanks?" she was now saying. "It's never the number you say—I can't run a kitchen if I don't know the number of lamb shanks.") His stare was making me very self-conscious.

I looked across at one of the cooks, Cesar, who was doing something with quails. The deliveryman hadn't moved—was he actually shaking his head?—when, somehow, I dragged the blade of Elisa's knife, smoothly and delicately, across the top of my forefinger, from behind the first knuckle to the nail. There was a moment: did I do what I think I did? Yes. And the top of my finger erupted in a gush of red blood.

"Did you just slice yourself?" Elisa asked, breaking off her lamb-shank count, and in a tone that said, You've been here half an hour, and this is what you've done?

"Yes," I said, "but not to worry." I wrapped my hand in the nearest soiled cloth. "I do this all the time. You should look at my fingers. A road map of scars and nicks. I think I need glasses. Nearsighted. Or farsighted. Both, actually. Really, it's what I do."

"Do you need to go to the hospital?" It sounded like an accusation.

I shook my head, a little worried by her worry. There was a lot of blood.

"Band-Aids are in the refrigerator," she said. "You'll need to wear a rubber glove. The Band-Aids won't stay dry."

I retreated to the dining room, crunched up the wound with a crisscrossing of Band-Aids, sank the thing into a rubber glove, and returned. It was nearly nine o'clock, and my cutting board had a modest square of about five inches of work space. The rest of it was stacked with pieces of duck.

And so I resumed. Chop, trim, wrestle, pop, thwack. I cleared my board. And, as I did, the Band-Aids started to work themselves loose, and the clear synthetic glove started to expand and droop, filling up like a water balloon with my blood. If I did this again, and sliced off a little bit of this glove, it was going to be a mess. But I was falling behind, and Elisa was looking at me.

She picked up a thigh. To me, it seemed I'd got the oyster. In front and back, wherever the thing was, there was plenty of meat. That wasn't the problem. "There's too much fat," she said, trimming it off, and then added, as if she'd failed to mention a crucial instruction, "You are aware that these are going to be served to people."

I came to like Elisa; she was, I realized, after a few weeks under her tough tutelage, teaching me the basic techniques of a chef, especially knife skills. It seems that I'd been using a knife for years without knowing how to use one. On that first morning, I paused to sharpen my knife, and Elisa stopped what she was doing and stared: I was doing it backward (ergo, I had always been doing it backward). Then, there was this rocking thing. The idea is that when you're chopping food you want to leave the tip of your knife in place, on the cutting board: you then end up rocking the knife back and forth, and the blade slides effortlessly, and with much more control, through whatever it is you're chopping. Everyone who cooks probably knows these things, but I didn't.

Some techniques seemed fussy. Carrots were a trauma. Long-cooking meat broths have carrots in them, along with celery, onions, and herbs, which soften the meatiness of a meat liquid. Evidently, there were only two ways to cut up a carrot, rough cut and fine dice. Rough cut meant slicing the carrot in half, lengthwise, and then—chop, chop, chop—cutting it into perfectly identical half moons (which, to my eye, had nothing rough about them).

The nightmare was fine dice, which meant cutting every bit of the carrot into an identical one-millimetre-square cube. A carrot is not shaped like a cube, and so you painstakingly had to trim it up into a long rectangle, then cut it into thin, one-millimetre planks, and then take your one-millimetre planks and cut them into long, one-millimetre slivers, and then take your perfectly formed slivers, and, chop, chop, chop, cut them into one-millimetre cubes. I seemed to have done my first batch almost right—either that or it was late and everyone was in a hurry and no one looked too closely at the geometric mishmash in the container I'd filled. My second batch involved thirty-six carrots. It took me a long time to cube thirty-six carrots. Normally, Elisa popped around to make sure I wasn't mangling what I was working on, but she must have trusted me with the carrots—after all, what can you do to a carrot?—so that when she finally looked in I was almost done. She shrieked, "I said fine dice. These are not fine dice. I don't know what they are, but they're wrong." I had been cutting carrots for two hours, and then, like that, they were tossed. I wanted to weep. It was some weeks later that I finally succeeded in getting carrots right, although the achievement was secretly marred by the fact that to earn Elisa's approbation—"These are good," she said, picking up my four-quart and dumping the contents into a braising liquid—I had discreetly eaten several hundred imperfect cubes.

I prepared pork for a ragù (only after my first batch was returned—"These are chunks, I asked for cubes") and learned how to trim the fat off a flank of beef. Jointing rabbits, I was taught how to tie up the loin with a butcher's looping knot, and I was so excited by the discovery that I went home and practiced. (I told Elisa about my accomplishment. "I tied up everything," I said. "A leg of lamb, some utensils, a chair. A friend came around, and I tied up her, too." She shook her head. "Get a life," she said, and returned to her task.)

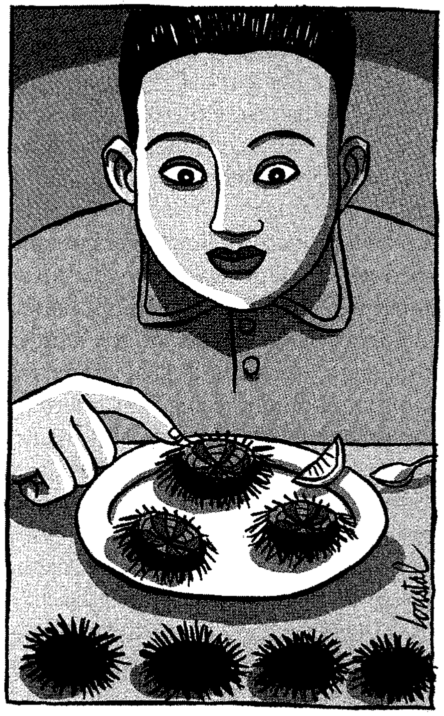
I became captivated by the smells. By midmorning, when many things had been prepared, they were cooked in quick succession, and the smells came one after the other, waves of smell, like sounds in music. There was the smell of meat—the kitchen was overwhelmed by the rich, sweet, sticky smell of older lamb. And then, in minutes, it was chocolate melting in a metal bowl. Then a disturbing non sequitur like tripe (a curious disjunction, having chocolate in your nose followed immediately by stewing cow innards). And then something ripe and fishy—octopus poaching in a hot tub—followed by an overextracted pineapple. And so they came, one after the other—huckleberries, chicken broth, the comforting chemistry of veal, pork, and milk as someone made a Bolognese ragù. Once I mastered some basic skills, I surprised myself by recognizing that I had stopped feeling self-conscious. There I was, in this back room, people's knives knocking against cutting boards in the same rhythmic rocking way, mine among them: no windows, no natural light; no connection to the outside world; no idea what the weather might be; only one phone, the number unlisted; unreachable—surrounded by these intense associations of festive meals.

Mario returned from Europe in 1985 and went to San Francisco, where he was soon joined by his brother. The two of them rented a Victorian house in the Haight-Ashbury district. Mario's first job, not a happy one, was for a catering firm, where he prepared the biggest meal of his life, an Apple Computer office party for seven thousand people, which was held at a baseball stadium—he remembers having to push out wheelbarrows of shrimp and distribute them with a shovel ("How much fun is that?")—but within six months he got what he was looking for, and was made a sous-chef at the Clift Hotel. For Dana Batali, being the roommate was not without the predictable stresses: he had an office job and had to leave at eight, which is when he regularly discovered his brother, along with several other chefs from the Clift Hotel kitchen, in various stages of collapse on the living-room floor, the room filled with smoke and empty bottles, the stereo on loud. Steve Crane, a friend who was a waiter at the time, remembers that he and Mario ("a clown riding around on a Suzuki 1100 painted to look like a zebra") spent their after-hours at Stars, the restaurant that had recently been opened by Jeremiah Tower, the so-called patriarch of California cuisine. "The perfect resto of the moment," Mario recalls. "Lively stylized food with attitude and energy—in short, much of the inspiration for everything I have done since."

This was at the height of the California food revolution—not just of Tower but also of Alice Waters (and her neo-Provençal cooking), of raw seafood and marinated shellfish, of citrusy vinaigrettes and bright-colored salsas. "It was there, during the California explosion, that I first met chefs who wanted to talk about their craft," Mario told me, "and where I learned that the palate is a very

FIRST TASTES BY CHANG-RAE LEE

SEA URCHIN



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

July, 1980. I'm about to turn fifteen and our family is in Seoul, the first time since we left, twelve years earlier. I don't know if it's different. My parents can't really say. They just repeat the equivalent of "How in the world?" whenever we venture into another part of the city, or meet one of their old friends. "Look at that—how in the world?" "This hot spell, yes, yes—how in the world?" My younger sister is very quiet in the astounding heat. We all are. It's the first time I notice how I stink. You can't help smelling like everything else. And in the heat everything smells of ferment and rot and rankness. In my grandfather's old neighborhood, where the two- and three-room houses stand barely head-high, the smell is staggering. "What's that?" I ask. My cousin says, "Shit."

"Shit? What shit?"

"Yours," he says, laughing. "Mine."

On the wide streets near the city center, there are student demonstrations; my cousin says they're a response to a massacre of citizens by the military down south in Kwangju. After the riot troops clear the avenues, the air is laden with tear gas—"spicy," in the idiom. Whenever we're in a taxi, moving through there, I open the window and stick out my tongue, trying to taste the poison, the human repellent. My mother wonders what's wrong with me.

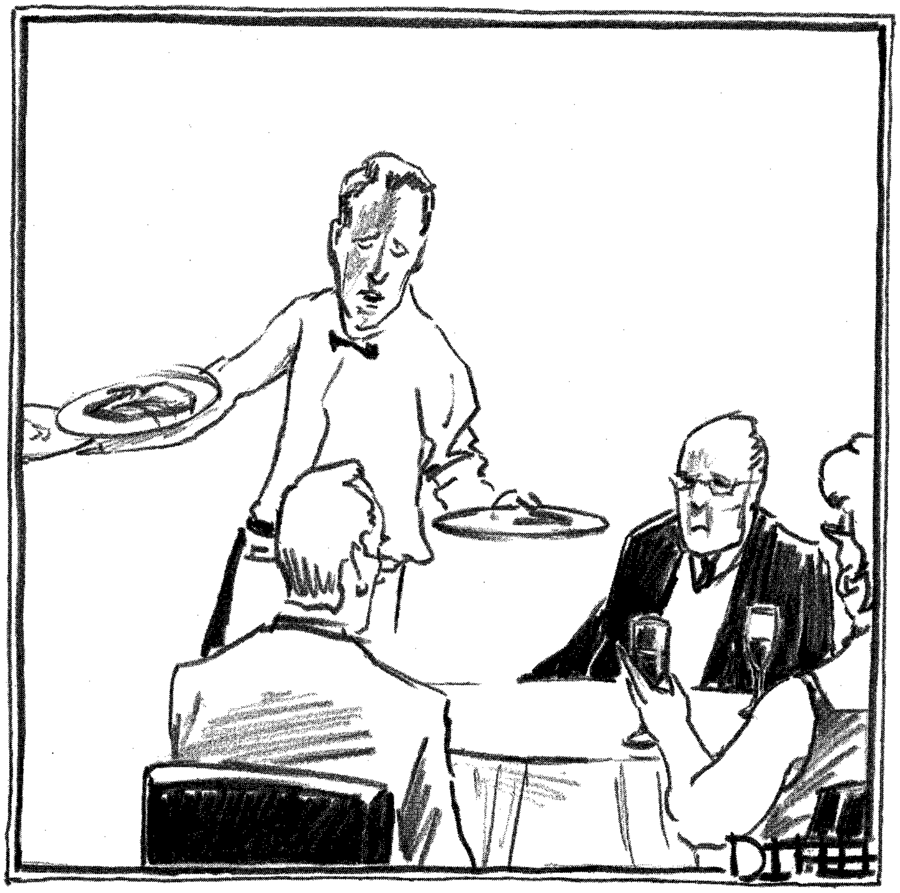
I don't know what's wrong. Or maybe I do. I'm bored. Maybe I'm craving a girl. I can't help staring at them, the ones clearing dishes in their parents' eateries, the uniformed schoolgirls walking hand in hand, the slim young women who work in the Lotte department store, smelling of fried kimchi and L'Air du Temps. They're all stunning to me, even with their bad teeth. I let myself drift near them, hoping for the scantest touch.

But there's nothing. I'm too obviously desperate, utterly hopeless. Instead, it seems, I can eat. I've always liked food, but now I'm bent on trying everything. As it is, the days are made up of meals, formal and impromptu, meals between meals and within meals; the streets are a continuous outdoor buffet of braised crabs, cold buckwheat noodles, shaved ice with sweet red beans on top. In Itaewon, the district near the United States Army base, where you can get anything you want, culinary or otherwise, we stop at a seafood stand for dinner. Basically, it's a tent diner, a long bar with stools, a camp stove and fish tank behind the proprietor, an elderly woman with a low, hoarse voice. The roof is a stretch of blue poly-tarp. My father is excited; it's like the old days. He wants raw fish, but my mother shakes her head. I can see why: in plastic bins of speckled, bloody ice sit semi-alive cockles, abalones, eels, conchs, sea cucumbers, porgies, shrimps. "Get something fried," she tells him, not caring what the woman might think. "Get something cooked."

A young couple sitting at the end of the bar order live octopus. The old woman nods and hooks one in the tank. It's fairly small, the size of a hand. She lays it on a board and quickly slices off the head with her cleaver. She chops the tentacles and gathers them up onto a plate, dressing them with sesame oil and a spicy bean sauce. "You have to be careful," my father whispers, "or one of the suction cups can stick inside your throat. You could die." The lovers blithely feed each other the sectioned tentacles, taking sips of *soju* in between. My mother immediately orders a scallion-and-seafood pancake for us, then a spicy cod-head stew; my father murmurs that he still wants something live, fresh. I point to a bin and say that's what I want—those split spiny spheres, like cracked-open meteorites, their rusty centers layered with shiny crenellations. I bend down and smell them, and my eyes almost water from the intense ocean tang. "They're sea urchins," the woman says to my father. "He won't like them." My mother is telling my father he's crazy, that I'll get sick from food poisoning, but he nods to the woman, and she picks up a half and cuts out the soft flesh.

What does it taste like? I'm not sure, because I've never had anything like it. All I know is that it tastes alive, something alive at the undragged bottom of the sea; it tastes the way flesh would taste if flesh were a mineral. And I'm half gagging, though still chewing; it's as if I had another tongue in my mouth, this blind, self-satisfied creature. That night I throw up, my mother scolding us, my father chuckling through his concern. The next day, my uncles joke that they'll take me out for some more, and the suggestion is enough to make me retch again.

But a week later I'm better, and I go back by myself. The woman is there, and so are the sea urchins, glistening in the hot sun. "I know what you want," she says. I sit, my mouth slick with anticipation and revulsion, not yet knowing why. ♦



"Careful, these plates are extremely dirty."

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individual thing." This is where he developed an appetite for vinegars and lemons. "Since then, my food has always been on the upper edge of acidity," he said. "I tune things up with acidity, I fix things with acidity. A lot of flawed food made by these French guys would be brightened up with just a touch of acidity—to get you salivating."

The Clift Hotel was owned by the Four Seasons, and after two years Mario was invited to work at the Biltmore in Santa Barbara, a stately old Spanish-colonial hotel the corporation had just bought and wanted to revitalize. Mario was brought in for all the obvious reasons ("energy, edge, fire, youth," according to Brian Young, the manager who hired him); he was given his own restaurant, La Marina, and, according to Mario, became, for his age (twenty-seven), the highest-paid young chef in the company. But the experience was restless-making. Mario mentions some "weak pastas," a smoked veal rack, a grilled lobster with fried artichokes. "The truth is, I don't have much memory of the time," he says. "I was staying out late. I was staying out very late." Andy Nusser, who is currently the executive chef at Babbo, met Mario then, at a late-night dinner party, where someone had brought foie gras but didn't know how to serve it. Rising to the challenge that a good chef should be able to make a meal with whatever is at hand, Mario prepared a sweet, vinegarlike reduction of orange Nehi soda and Starburst fruit candies. ("First, you remove each Starburst fruit gum from its wax-paper wrapper and put the candies in a saucepan, where, over a low heat, you melt them until you have a bright-colored syrup, and, then, separately, you cook the soda, until it's reduced by half.") Nusser insists that the result was very good (and was so impressed that he decided that night to become a chef).

At the end of that year, the Four Seasons management asked Mario to run a more exclusive restaurant, in Hawaii ("They begged me, they were desperate"). Batali not only turned down the offer; he quit. He called his father, Armandino. Did he know of a place in Italy where he might be able to work for room and board? He wanted to learn how to cook like his grandmother, Leonetta Merlino Batali.

Leonetta Merlino had grown up working in the first Italian import store in Washington—Merlino's, which her parents had opened in Seattle in 1903. The store was sold in the late sixties, and it has been a source of aggravating regret to Mario that his father didn't take it over. ("They lost it," Mario recalls. "They fucked it up.") Everyone in the family has powerful memories of visits to Leonetta's house for lunch (her husband died when Mario was six), which featured her handmade ravioli. Although she made large batches of the stuff, a thousand, twelve hundred at a time, relying on a family recipe from Abruzzi (an improbable mixture of calf's brains, pork sausage, chicken, Swiss chard, and parmigiano and Romano cheeses), and rolling out the dough with a long pole, prized for the texture it created ("rough, like a cat's tongue"), she allowed the children only six pieces. They still talk about it ("We knew there were more!" Gina Batali recalls. "We could see them!"), but the grandmother was determined to teach them to eat a family meal in an Italian way, with the pasta coming after the antipasto (a plate of *salume* and marinated vegetables) and before the secondo, of roasted meat, often lamb, always cooked with rosemary, always well done. The ravioli recipe is still in the family—Mario's brother prepares it on Christmas Day (Leonetta, having made the ravioli so often she had no idea how she did it, was filmed by a cousin, who prompted her with questions)—as are many other of Leonetta's recipes, preserved on two thousand three-by-five cards: a pasta sauce made from spare ribs (with, Mario recalls, "this kind of red pinky piggy flavor"); tripe; and, a feature of New Year's Eve, a salty *baccalà* (dried codfish, rehydrated with milk and cooked until it breaks down and becomes a sauce), served with hot polenta poured out onto a wooden board.

Armandino Batali sent me copies of some of the recipes. I found the stack of three-by-five cards surprisingly moving, a kitchen conversation between the dead and the living. I've often thought that food is a concentrated messenger of a culture, compacted into the necessity of our having to eat to survive, and I felt this powerfully as I read these mementos from another generation and listened to Armandino's children talk about the eccentric-seeming recipes of their grandmother, who had learned them from her mother in the back room of a food store in Seattle, who, in turn, had learned them from *her* mother, in a house in a village in Abruzzi.

Armandino did not know of a place where Mario might work with a matronly Italian cook in exchange for room and board. But he had some friends who might know. He wrote five letters and got one reply. It was a trattoria on a hill above a town where airplane parts are made for Boeing. Room and board for the son of Armandino? A sous-chef for a Four Seasons restaurant? Of course. When can he start?

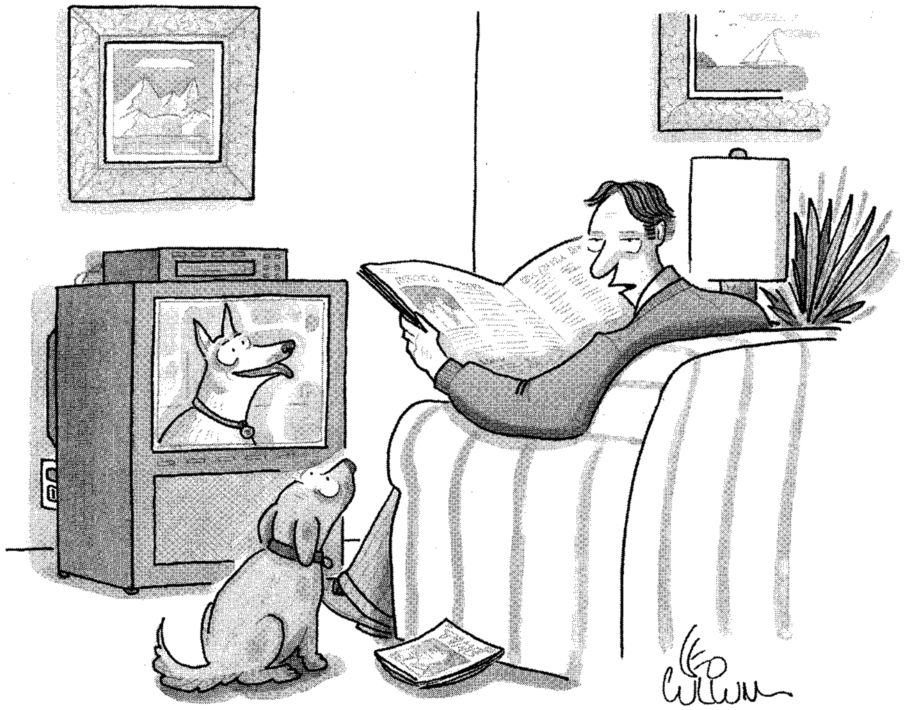
The Babbo kitchen is actually several kitchens. In the mornings, this small space—the work area is about twenty-five feet by ten—is called the prep kitchen, and is run by Elisa. In the evenings, it is called the service kitchen, and is run by Andy Nusser. And between the hours of one and five the two kitchens (more metaphors than places) overlap.

During this period, the prep chefs try to finish their duties and the evening cooks get their stations ready. There can be between fifteen and eighteen people in the kitchen. In many ways, these afternoons are exaggerated expressions of something that is characteristic of both New York (where space is precious and its value inflated) and the restaurant business (where the size of the kitchen and the dining room are financial calculations, and a small kitchen means more tables). At Babbo, the space concern is extreme. There is no lunch service because the metaphoric prep kitchen is still working at lunchtime; there is also no lunch service because so much of the restaurant's equipment—tablecloths, napkins, cutlery, plates, glasses—is stored underneath the banquettes where a lunch crowd would sit. (Every morning, the restaurant is taken apart; every afternoon it is put back together.) The so-called Babbo "office" is an extension of the plumbing, jerry-built in whatever basement cranny presented itself at the time. (When a hot-water tank exploded—water for washing the dishes had to be boiled—the walls of the office were taken down so that the repairmen could get to the tank.) The desk of Mario's assistant is near a slop sink, gurgling with the foodstuffs swirling into it. The smell is pervasive.

There is a hierarchy about space. Mario had warned me of this, after I mentioned that I must have been sticking my butt out because I kept getting bumped ("They bump you because they can—they're putting you in your place"). The next day I counted: I was bumped forty times. Space is Andy's first concern when he arrives; he goes straight to the walk-in to see if he can shift the contents of the large containers to smaller ones (if he can't, the work being done by the prep kitchen will have no place to be stored). Once, I was helping him prepare a salad. We started in the dining room, because there was no space in the kitchen. We moved to the dark coffee station when tables were being set up, until finally we were backed up against the ladies' room. If you're lucky enough to get a perch in the kitchen, you don't leave it. You don't answer the phone, run an errand, make a cup of coffee, have a pee, or, when you return, you won't have your space. Around two o'clock, trays of braising meat come out of the oven, but there is no place to put them, so they are stacked on the first available surface—a waste bin, the pasta freezer, somebody's lunch. Trays are stacked on top of those trays. And sometimes there are trays stacked on top of those.

Mario flits between the shifts, unpredictably. When the restaurant opened, he was the expediter, the one who read off the orders when they appeared on a ticker-tape machine (having been dispatched by a touch-screen computer in the dining room) and approved the plates before they went out. That role has been taken over by Andy, but the public expectation is that Mario is still running the kitchen (an idea that he reinforces, flamboyantly rushing out plates from the kitchen to special customers). The year after Babbo opened, he had a brain aneurysm, alarming his family. ("I thought, Oh, my God, here it comes," Dana Batali recalls. "Mario's Marilyn Monroe moment, having burned up both ends of the candle.") It also alarmed Babbo customers, who cancelled their reservations. ("The only time anyone could just walk in and get a table," Elisa remembers.)

One afternoon while I was working



"You could have had a film career, but you were needed here to fetch the paper."

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF ANOTHER KIND

A dim haunt known as the High Dive
was the scene of my first rapt exposure to
the drawling vowels and the dismissive smile
by which you delivered to outer darkness
an already blacked-out companion
still decorative enough, despite the toll
of drugs and dirty dancing, to elicit
what seemed, at first, like an indulgent kiss-off:
"No, don't wake him: let lying dogs sleep."

Horrified and charmed by such abuse
(once the point sank in), I knew enough to steer
clear of such tactics as the Freezing Shoulder
and (your words) a Sociable Stab-in-the-Front . . .
But now you were . . . here! That laugh of yours
could not be missed, even in a triplex flat
(I had my oxymorons down) where gay men
gorgeously dressed (and even gowned) made movement—
there must have been a hundred of us!—

difficult but quite a lot of fun.
I think the place had belonged to Doris Duke
in the thirties when the Drive meant Riverside,
or was it Barbara Hutton's hideaway
back then? now come (or coming) to this:
my first *thé dansant*, and with a novice's
nervousness I had to take a piss! I sought
(and found) the proper cubicle for comfort
till I flicked on the light, whereupon—

in the prep kitchen, Mario showed up to make a special called a *cioppino*. He'd prepared the dish the night before, but it got only four orders. ("This time, I'm going to tell the waiters to push it, and if they don't sell out I'll fire them," he said, cheerfully.) *Cioppino* is a contraction of *C'è un po'*?—"Is there a little something?"—and is an Italian-immigrant soup, made from leftovers and whatever little something a member of the household was able to beg from the fishermen at the end of the day. The little something, on this occasion, was going to be crabmeat, and, in the spirit of the dish, Mario proceeded to collect what was on hand—tomato pulp and liquid (left over from tomatoes that had been roasted), plus any spare vegetables. He would charge twenty-nine dollars.

Mario was taking over a position normally occupied by Dominic Cipollone, the sauté chef. Dominic has been at Babbo for two years; it is his first major restaurant job. ("Whatever he is," Mario says, "we made him.") He has a heavy, saturnine manner and a Fred Flintstone in-need-of-a-shave look, and, at one point on this afternoon, in his lugubrious way he turned and ran into Mario.

"Dom, you bumped me," Mario said.

Dominic apologized. His tone was ironic; it said, Of course I bumped you. You're a big guy and you were in my way.

"Dom, don't ever do that again," Mario said.

Dom was unsure how to respond. Was it a joke?

"I do not want to you to bump me," Mario continued. "You see this counter? I own it. You see this floor? I own it. Everything here I own. I don't want you to bump me."

I discovered Dominic in the walk-in. "I've got Mario at my station," he said. "I'm cleaning up after him, and he's bumping me. I'm staying here."

Once Mario leaves the kitchen, you never know when he's coming back. Elisa recalls the trepidation that surrounded his departures in the early days, especially during a Chinatown phase, when he returned with purchases he felt should be served as specials: duck feet, say, duck tongues, a bag of jellyfish, which in the tradition of preparing local ingredients in an Italian way he cut up into small strips, marinated in olive oil with lemon and basil, and served, raw, as a salad. "It was disgusting," Elisa says. It was equally unnerving when Mario returned with nothing, because, with no distractions, he invariably started rooting around in the trash. The first time I witnessed this—and it's a peculiar sight, this large man bent over and up to his elbows in a black plastic sack of discarded foodstuffs—I was the unwitting object of his investigation. I had been cutting celery into a fine dice and was tossing away the leafy tips (after all, how do you cube the leaves?). The leaves have the most concentrated flavor of the celery, and I knew that it couldn't be right to be throwing them away, but that's what I was doing: I had a lot of celery to dice.

"What the hell is this?" Mario asked, when he appeared, holding up a handful of my celery leaves, before plunging back into the plastic bag to see what else was there to discover—more celery leaves, of course, hundreds of them. He pulled them out, shaking off whatever greasy thing was adhering to their leaves. "What have you done?" he asked me in astonishment. "You're throwing away the best part of the celery! *New Yorker* guy—busted! Remember our rule: we make money by buying food, fixing it up, and getting other people to pay for it. We do not make money by buying food and then throwing it away." I witnessed the garbage routine several more times, involving kidneys ("Elisa, we don't throw away lamb kidneys"), the green stems of fresh garlic ("Frank, what are you doing?

Bingo! right there on top of the tank
appeared a pair of minuscule dragons locked
in coital combat, motionless and *hissing!*
Had I had a foreskin then, it would have shrunk
to string. As it was, what I did have
retracted; I zipped up and quickly withdrew
to join the decorously apparelled crew
(though some were already making out,
quite unimpeded by their raiment,

in postures all too reminiscent
of the grappling creatures I so cravenly
left behind)—and found myself now face to face
with you, James Merrill, Terror of the Revels,
waiting your turn with marked containment.
"Two . . . two lizards in there," I stammered, "fucking
on the toilet tank. They're not moving, but I didn't . . .
I couldn't . . . I don't know how they got there or
why they're doing that, but you shouldn't . . ."

And as you glided past me into
the powder room with the imperturbable
amenity of Talleyrand, you murmured
in the languid accents distinctly recalled
from that earlier encounter and
reverberating ever since down shared decades
when I would hear them with eager delight, yes,
but always with a touch of fear: "Well, of course,
dear: iguana see, iguana do . . ."

—*Richard Howard*

These are perfect in soup"), and the rough dirty tops from wild leeks ("Somebody talk to the vegetable guy—he's killing me"). Anything vaguely edible was thrown out only if it was confirmed that Mario wasn't in.

In the evenings, I plated pasta.

"Like this," Mario said. He took my tongs before I could plate the spaghetti. "You want to make a mound of the pasta, give it as much air as possible." And, later, with the tortelloni: "You want only a splash of sauce. It's about the pasta, not the sauce." He explained the components of the dish. The tortelloni was a soft, pillowy pasta, stuffed with goat cheese and served with dried orange zest and a dusting of fennel pollen. The fennel pollen was like an exaggerated version of fennel and was the discovery of the food writer Faith Willinger. And the orange peel? For no other reason than that orange and fennel are a classic combination. The result gave some bite to a soft, unacidic dish.

Mario was examining the plates going out. He eyed a skirt steak and addressed the grill chef, Mark Barrett. "Your salsa verde is breaking up. You've got too much oil in it, and the plate is too hot. Replate." He studied a dish from the sauté station—the duck—stuck his finger into it, and tasted. "Dom, take down your sauce." It was too salty, needed diluting. "And the duck," he said, picking up a slice of the breast. "You want to give the fatty side an extra minute. The meat is fine." It was verging on rare. "But render more of the fat."

An orecchiette was returned from the dining room, half eaten, the plate borne into the kitchen by the maître d', John Mainieri, who explained, "There are not enough florets on the broccoli." Five people gathered around the plate and started eating from it. "She says that the last time she ate here the broccoli had more florets." Everyone picked out a floret and stared at it closely.

"It's true," Mario said. "We've had larger florets, but nature isn't making big florets at the moment."

Mario seemed to accept returns with remarkable cheer. On one occasion, a bucatini was sent back. "The meat was rancid," the waiter said. The meat was *guanciale*, "the pride of the restaurant," Andy observed. But another pasta was prepared, and Mario handed it to a runner. "When you give it to him," Mario said, "will you pistol-whip him with your penis?"

This evening, another return, half an hour later, again from the broccoli-floret table. A steak. It was chewy. "She doesn't want a new dish. She wants steak, properly prepared." (The cooks assaulted the steak, indignantly tearing off pieces with their hands, and turned to each other, saying, "Chewy?")

Then the second steak came back as well. Now, evidently, it had been overcooked. And there was also a chop. It, too, was not satisfactory.

"For fuck's sake," Mario declared, finally losing his patience. "Find out their names. They're not coming back." He paused. "What are they drinking?"

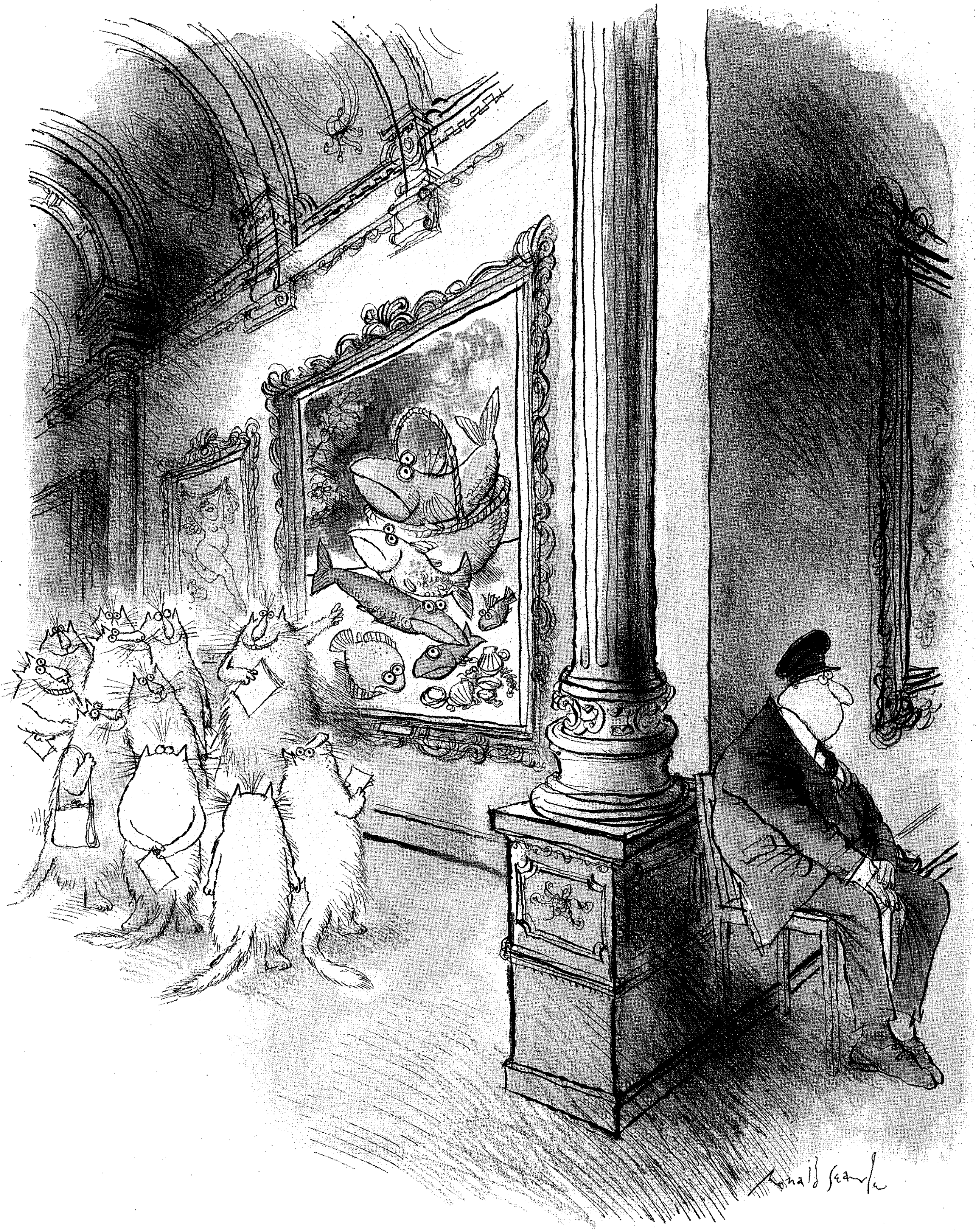
"A Solaia 1997." Four hundred and seventy-five dollars per bottle.

"Forget it," Mario said, and ordered another round of entrées.

The restaurant in Italy that Armandino found for Mario was called La Volta, and was run by two brothers, Gianni and Roberto Valdiserri. (Roberto was an engineer at the factory that made the airplane parts.)

La Volta is perched on a hill overlooking a mountainous valley between Bologna and Florence, above the town of Porretta Terme, where Mario arrived, late on a Monday afternoon in November, 1989, completing a train journey that had begun in London the day before. He was bearing golf clubs, even though there was no golf course for more than fifty miles, and an electric guitar with a small boom-box amplifier ("total fuzz at volume 3"), in the hope that when he ran low on money he could cover his expenses by busking. He was wearing pajamalike pantaloons and red clogs. But there was no one to meet him ("Alone in the train station in bumfuck"), he didn't know how to use the

SKETCHBOOK BY RONALD SEARLE


Ronald Searle

phones, and he couldn't speak Italian. When Roberto and Gianni finally showed up, they were astonished by what they saw. He did not look like the highest-paid sous-chef from the Four Seasons; he looked like a peasant from Eastern Europe, Roberto told me when I visited the place last September.

The "terme" in Porretta Terme means bath, and comes from the local sulfur springs. On my first morning there, I was woken by loud oompah-pah music and an instructor on a loudspeaker leading an exercise class of elderly women in a sulfur pool. In the town center, most of the buildings date from the thirties, around the time it was discovered that sustained exposure to the local vapors had therapeutic merit. There were two discos and three ice-cream venders. I couldn't find the place listed in a tourist guide. But the mountains, rising steep and green out of the valley floor, were uncultivated and wild, and were on the border between the two greatest regions of Italian cooking—Tuscany, with its game and wine, and Emilia-Romagna, with its cheese, pasta, and cured meats.

Roberto and Gianni drove Mario to the restaurant, about four miles up a zigzaggy hill. There was an apartment above the restaurant, Mario's new home. The restaurant was closed that day, but they prepared a small seasonal supper for their new chef ("I'm, like, holy shit, family meal and we're having white truffles!"), and, eying him warily, introduced him to the members of the family. Roberto was the expediter, after he finished his job in the factory. Gianni managed the place. Betta, Gianni's wife, was the cook. Her father, Quintiglio Canarini, was the forest forager, truffle scavenger, and mystic gardener.

The next morning, Mario reported for duty. Betta didn't show up for two more hours, and then she rolled a giant pasta sheet by hand. Mario began taking notes and started a six-month apprenticeship in what he calls the "ladies' trick" of handmade pasta. Betta went on to make *stricchetti*, small bow ties, which were served with sliced porcini mushrooms and little red onions cooked in olive oil—*stricchetti ai funghi*. She made a different pasta the next day and a different ragù, one with guinea-hen legs. It was a month before anyone prepared a classic Bolognese. "They'd got bored of it," Mario said, "but then they taught me how to do it and that became my weekly task. Veal and pork and beef and *pancetta*, slowly cooked with olive oil and butter. Just browning and browning, although it never turns brown, because of the fat that has come out of the meat, and then you add white wine and milk and, at the end, a little tomato paste, so that it's pink-brown."

He befriended Quintiglio ("a salt-of-the-earth dude with big feet, strong hands, a deep voice, floppy Italian ears, and a buttoned-up shirt and jacket") and accompanied him when he went looking for berries and mushrooms. He had rules about porcini and picked the ones found near oak and chestnut trees—the ones under the pines and poplars were inferior. His real talent was finding truffles. In time, Mario and Quintiglio fell into the habit of having breakfast before the others got up—an egg baked in olive oil with a slice of Fontina cheese and a truffle on top. For Christmas, Quintiglio showed Mario how to make a classic *brodo*—the holiday broth served with tortellini. It required an old chicken (one no longer producing eggs), beef bones, an onion, and a carrot—the vegetables left whole to keep the broth clear. The tortellini was stuffed with mortadella (a very Bolognese ingredient), mixed with turkey, parmigiano, and nutmeg. In the spring, they started eating from Quintiglio's garden, which was planted according to a lunar schedule (lettuce during a waxing moon; beets and parsnips during a waning one). Quintiglio took Mario into the river for the "weird little watercress that grew there" and a bitter wild dandelion, which he boiled for nearly an hour and served with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. "Every mouthful of what he made was poetry," Mario says. For Mario, Quintiglio was the first proponent of finding what is made by the land around you and feasting on it, of learning to taste its uniqueness, of recognizing that you are eating something that you can enjoy only now, here, during this day in a season, grown in this dirt.

But the first months were not easy. Dana Batali recalls it as a time when Mario was forced to learn humility, and "the things he wanted to cook were scoffed at," although, from what I can tell, the dishes Mario prepared (raw scampi, a leek soufflé, grappa-cured salmon) were done only to establish his credentials and to remind his hosts that he had been, until recently, highly regarded as a chef. But Mario's father also picked up an uneasiness in his son's voice when they spoke on the phone. "The experience shook him up," he recalls. For his part, Mario remembers it as the last lonely time in his life, a sustained pleasurable period of melancholy, "a happy sadness." At the end of dinner, he'd go to his room, light a candle, put on headphones, and, listening mainly to Tom Waits in his ballady, self-pitying, hey-buddy-can-I-have-another-drink phase, read (working his way through the novels of Faulkner), looking up to take in the view—the mountains, the River Reno—and longing for company but recognizing that he was better off without it. "It was a great rush. I knew that first week, once I saw the food, that I'd made the right move. The food was traditional. Very simple. No sauces, no steam tables, no pans of stock, none of the things I'd learned to do. This was exactly what I'd hoped for."

Mario remained in Italy for three more years, and when he returned to the United States, in 1992, he was a different person. "Italy changed Mario," his father recalls. "It made him serious; it gave him his culture." He had been poor for a long time; he was now ready "to make money." A friend from Rutgers, Arturo Sighinolfi, who had visited Mario in Italy and stayed in the apartment above La Volta, provided the opportunity. Arturo's father was about to retire; for twenty-five years, he'd run Rocco, an old-fashioned Italian-American restaurant off Bleecker Street, in Manhattan's so-called red-sauce zone. Arturo invited Mario to run the restaurant with him as a fifty-fifty partner—Arturo in the front, Mario in the kitchen. There was an apartment upstairs where Mario could live. The new Rocco, inspired by La Volta, would have a powerful Italian menu, not an Italian-American one.

It was the second week of March, the warmest day since the summer, and I had been at Babbo for nearly two months. Everyone wanted to change the menu. The rabbit would be served not with Brussels sprouts but with spring peas, pea shoots, and a bright-orange vinaigrette made from baby carrots. ("We're giving you not only the rabbit but what's inside his head," Mario explained. "You get to eat him and what he wants to eat, too!") There was a delivery of fava beans. They were to replace the chickpeas in a dish called Pyramids in Brodo, an item introduced by Mario the previous week—a piece of pasta architecture squeezed at the top and stuffed with what was left over from boning the ducks: the gizzards, some duck ragù, and a risotto made with duck stock. ("No one has any idea what's inside—it could be Jeffrey Dahmer's penis, for all they know.") Wild nettles had been ordered but hadn't arrived. "This is so typical," the pastry chef, Gina DePalma, observed. "The moment it gets warm, everyone wants spring. Fava beans, berries, and English peas, but it takes the earth longer to catch up with the weather, and I worry about what we're going to get. It won't be local." In fact, the fava beans and peas came from California; the market in Union Square was still barren, except for the first batch of ramps, the unequivocally local wild leek from upstate New York, which were now added to spaghetti, put on top of a pork tenderloin, draped across a wild striped bass, pickled for the summer, and eaten regularly by the chefs—thrown on the flat top, squirted with oil, turned once, and scooped up with tongs.

Early on, I'd asked Mario what I could expect to learn from my time here. "The difference between the home cook and the professional," he said. "You'll learn the reality of the kitchen. As a home cook, you can prepare anything any way anytime. It doesn't matter if your lamb is rare for your friends on Saturday, and not so rare when they come back next year. But here people want exactly what they had last time. Consistency under pressure. And that's the reality—a lot of pressure." I would also develop an expanded kitchen awareness: "You'll discover how to use your senses. You'll find you no longer rely on what your watch says. You'll hear when something is cooked; you'll smell degrees of doneness."

It was an unlikely prospect, especially when the kitchen remained so stubbornly incomprehensible. The menu was crazy, so wildly large and varied—some fifty pastas, sixty entrées, and forty desserts—that the pace was always frenzied. In fact, I was being educated by the frenzy. Over and over again, I'd pick up a smell, as a task was being completed, until finally I came to identify not only what it was but where it was in its preparation. The next day, it would be the same again. I was reminded of a recollection of Andy Nusser's, when he decided that he wanted to be a chef and went to cooking school. "You don't learn knife skills at cooking school," Andy said, "because they give you only six onions, and, no matter how hard you focus on those six onions, there are only six of them, and you're not going to learn as much as when you cut up a hundred." Repetition is at the heart of cooking. One day, I was given a hundred and fifty lamb tongues. I had never held a lamb's tongue, which I found to be greasy and unnervingly humanlike. But, after cooking, trimming, peeling, and slicing a hundred and fifty, I'd become an expert.

One morning, Elisa went out to deal with a delivery, and I picked up a change in the way the lamb shanks smelled. They were browning in a large pan about ten feet away, and I walked over, in a trance, turned them, and resumed my task. My nose had told me that they were sufficiently browned and that in a minute they'd be ruined. By the time Elisa returned, I'd removed the shanks and thrown in another batch. She looked at me, slightly startled.

It was a modest breakthrough, and I was then allowed to cook. The first item, appropriately, was lamb shanks; they were followed by beef cheeks and short ribs (browned and then braised in a wine-based liquid until they started to fall apart). Then duck thighs, rabbit ragù, beef tongue, and guinea-hen legs.

Working alongside Mario, I recalled a suggestion he'd made, that at some point I might try being a line cook. When can I start? I asked him.

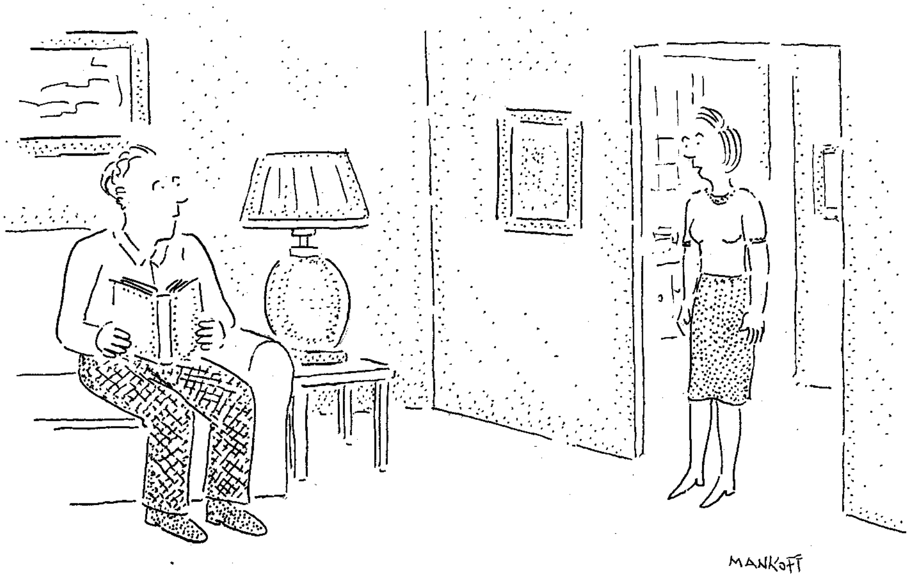
"What about now?" He addressed the grill chef. "Mark, move over. As of tonight, you're training a new person."

The dishes Mario prepared in 1992 at the new Rocco read like episodes in an autobiography; each one is so intimately associated with a specific moment in Mario's life that the menu is more literary than culinary—cooking as memoir. Ravioli stuffed with brains and Swiss chard is his grandmother's recipe. A review in *New York* singled out an "old-fashioned tagliatelle in a ragù Bolognese"—the very ragù that Mario prepared weekly at La Volta. The *stricchetti* with porcini and cremini is a variation on what Betta made on Mario's first day in her kitchen. The leek soufflé (with grappa-cured salmon) was the dish that Mario had cooked for his first

SNACKS
Hot Coff

"Decaf's out of toner."

Christmas lunch in Italy, to prove that he, too, could cook. Mario had finally arrived in New York City, and had a lifetime of cooking to express.



"In case you're interested, I'll be in the basement preserving resentments for the winter."

In his second month at Rocco, Mario met Susan Cahn, his future wife, who grew specialty vegetables and sold cheese on behalf of her parents, the owners of Coach Farm. She then went to Rocco to celebrate her birthday. Mario's family happened to be in town from Seattle—also there to celebrate a birthday, his mother's. Cahn recalls Mario rushing back and forth from the kitchen, returning each time with a surprise—another course, another bottle of wine, another grappa, and, finally, an accordion, which his father began playing, leading everyone in Italian drinking songs until three in the morning. Cahn, who is so many things that Batali isn't—petite, dark-haired, East Coast, Jewish to his lapsed Catholic, early-to-bed to his out-until-early, reserved and deliberate to his outgoing and impulsive—illustrates the kind of person Batali probably gets on with best. "I'm *very*, *very* different," she told me, as though to say: "Get real. Mario could not live with another version of himself." Arturo Sighinolfi, his new business partner, was, it seems, not so different, and, nine months into the enterprise, their partnership collapsed.

They weren't getting customers, and even Dana Batali was perplexed: "The food was good. I don't know why no one came to eat it." Whatever it was, it confused the regulars. "I asked Mario to start slowly," Arturo told me, when I tracked him down in Miami, where he is now a bartender. "I've been to Italy. I know what's good. I didn't like the old style of food, either. But I said, 'Let's incorporate your stuff with the old menu.' But no, for Mario it was his way or the highway. This was my father's restaurant. I'd known the customers for twenty-five years. They looked at the menu, said 'What's this shit?,' and walked out."

The parting was acrimonious, and Arturo still has nightmares about it. (He'd had one the night before I phoned: "I can never watch the Food Network, because I don't know when he's going to be on it and I don't want to see him again.")

Mario was unemployed and homeless. Armandino invited him to return to Seattle, and he developed a business plan for a restaurant—a longing born out of the regret of having allowed Merlino's, the family store, to be sold. Mario didn't take up his father's invitation, because, finally, he'd found a venue. (And, in the aftermath, Armandino, inspired by his son, moved to Italy, at the age of fifty-eight, to be an unpaid apprentice to two butchers in Tuscany, where, in a complicated variation on the father-like-son adage, he learned how to cure meats—something his own father had done. Last year, Armandino's business, Salumi, a *salume* factory that serves lunch, was awarded twenty-seven points for its food by the Zagat survey of America's top restaurants, one more point than Babbo.)

The new venue was Pó, a former Indian restaurant with a low-rent lease that Batali picked up from a panicky landlord when the tenants left in the middle of the night. Batali, with no money, borrowed (some from Cahn—she said, "There was never a moment's doubt that he was going to succeed"), and invited his friend Steve Crane, from San Francisco, to be his partner. They opened the restaurant six weeks later, in May, 1993, quietly, because they didn't have the cash to buy many ingredients, and had no liquor license and no air-conditioning (during the second-hottest summer in the history of the city). But they were in business, and at the end of August the *Times* food critic Eric Asimov wandered in, and was overwhelmed by the pure Italianness of the food. It was, Mario recalls, heartening to find, at last, that "the food I wanted to make in New York City was the food that the people of New York City wanted to eat."

Pó is like a teen-age Babbo—thirteen tables, plus two out on the sidewalk in summer—with similar lighting and design (both places were designed by a cousin of Cahn's) and a menu that was heavily influenced by La Volta. For Steve Crane, the first two years were the best. Mario was in the kitchen ("like an athlete"), Crane was in the front, and the place became a late-night haunt of chefs, the result, Crane recalls, of Mario's pressing his card into the hands of the people he met, building up a business by word of mouth, and consolidating it by treating invited customers as V.I.P.s. (The practice has been refined at Babbo, and the only times I've seen Batali red-faced with anger involved the neglect of V.I.P.s. He rarely shouts, but when the maître d' failed to spot a record producer who had appeared at the bar he exploded—"You fucking moron. You fucking motherfucking moron"—and chased him out of the kitchen with such menace that I thought he was going to throw something. "If it's a V.I.P. table, you prepare the order *now*," he once hissed at the kitchen staff, reinforcing his rule that V.I.P.s get served first and fast. "You don't prepare the food when you're good and ready. You don't make them wait because you're a fucking great talent in the kitchen and you know better. You are not some fucking artist. I am counting. Ten seconds. They must have their starters in ten seconds. Nine. Eight. Seven." And, with hysterical speed, the starters appeared, the pale look on the pantry chefs preparing them being one of unmitigated panic.)

According to Crane, the problems at Pó started after the head of programming at the nascent Food Network saw Mario running the kitchen with just one assistant, and invited him to do a test show. Mario the celebrity chef produced strains between the partners. Crane recalls, "I'd walk in, and there'd be a photo shoot I didn't know about, and the photographer would say, 'Hey, you there, get out of the way.' " ("What could I do?" Mario asks. "No one was interested in the maître d'.") Three years ago, Mario assigned a price to the restaurant, and gave Crane a choice: pay it, it's yours; take it, it's mine. Crane paid. When the deal was signed, tears welled up in Mario's eyes. "Mario is the toughest guy I know," Crane said. " 'Hit me with your best punch,' that's his attitude. I had never seen him cry." It was painful, Mario said. "It was like someone putting his name on your first baby." Mario had never thought that Crane would want the restaurant. "He was shocked," Crane says. "He didn't think I could run the place without him." And yet, curiously, he isn't running the place without him. Mario remains, in a ghostly fashion—not only on the menu (which features many of his La Volta dishes) but, maybe, even in the kitchen. "Is Mario here?" I mischievously asked a waitress when I ate there last weekend. "Not tonight," she said, clearly distressed by having to answer a question put to her regularly.

Cooking is about transferring heat, and the most rudimentary method is the grill: the source is a flame, and food is placed above it until enough heat has been absorbed to change its molecular makeup. Grilled foods have two textures—they're cooked inside and out, with a skin that has been caramelized by the direct exposure to the flame—and at Babbo there are a lot of grilled items (the method says "rustic, outdoors, Italian"). There's meat, like lamb chops, which you cook until your "touch" tells you it's done (big cuts, like a three-inch rib-eye steak, need to be cooked in an oven as well); birds, which you cook until you simply know they're done (or you split them open slightly and have a peek inside); and there's a fish—branzino, or Mediterranean sea bass.

The branzino, stuffed with fennel and roasted garlic, is always cooked the same way. The grill is the size of an oven top, about four feet by three, with flames coming from long gas jets, and the fish is put on it at an angle, with its tail pointing to the left-hand corner and its head to the right. This is the practice for the meat as well—cooked on the diagonal, then turned ninety degrees and cooked on the other diagonal, which gives it the crusty skin and the grill's crisscrossing hatch marks. It is also a way of insuring that you know where your meat is at any moment. Stage one—it's pointing to the right. Stage two—it's pointing to the left. Stage three—flipped over, and still pointing to the left. And the last stage, pointing back to the right. (It seems obvious, but when the grill gets busy you need the obvious.) With the branzino, you do the first crisscross turn with a pair of tongs—lifting the fish by pinching its flesh, with one tong on top and the other one slipped into its opened cavity. Once that side is done, you roll it over gently. The tricky part is the last stage, when you grab the head, slip one of your tongs underneath the tail, and lift it. Three things can go wrong. If it's done lurchingly, the fish breaks in half. If it's done too soon, the skin sticks to the grill. And if it's done too slowly your arms go up in flames. On my first night, more than twenty branzinos were ordered; by seven o'clock, the hair on my arms had disappeared, except for one straggly patch by my elbow, which had melted into a black goo. But by the second night I seemed to be getting it—such is the pedagogy of relentless repetition.

I was coming to recognize that there are two kinds of cooks: those who do meat and those who do pastry. The pastry cook is the scientist and works with exact measurements and stable ingredients that behave in a predictable fashion. You mix a specific quantity of milk, eggs, sugar, and flour, and you have a pastry. If you add more butter, your pastry is crumbly; another egg, it's cakey. It's mathematical.

The cooking of meat, though, is variation and improvisation. Meat is, after all, the tissue of a once living creature: each piece is different, and there are no easy rules for cooking it. Meat is done when it feels done. This can't be taught in a cookbook—this feel, a thing you learn until it's stored in your memory, like a smell. Conventionally, a piece of meat—a lamb chop, say—is medium rare when it has a certain softness to the touch. (To illustrate, Mario would press the softest part of his pudgy palm and say the meat should have "this kind of bounce," a pillowy trampoline puffiness, which was no help, because his hands are like no one else's, great mitts of excess, squat and wide.) I kept getting it wrong. My touch, the second after I'd turned the meat, glistening with hot fat, was always heavy-handed, and I'd burn myself, and I wouldn't know if it was *the* moment or not.

Then I began touching the meat not for doneness but for undoneness. I'd put my lamb chops on the grill—five of them, each a different shape, with a different quantity of fat—and touch one, even though I knew it was going to be soft and mushy. Then I'd turn the chop and touch it again. Still soft, like wet wool. Turn it, touch it—so on, until, finally, one of the chops started, just, to get firmer. Touch it. Firmer still. Touch it. No change. Touch it. Ready.

Because meat needs to rest, meat dishes are cooked the moment an order comes in. Orders are called out by the expediter, and the person at each station calls them back in confirmation. "Two Chinos," Andy would say, which was kitchen shorthand for a pasta tasting menu (because the pasta chef was Asian), and he answered, "Two Chinos." Or: "Followed by Love, Sweetie, Butt," meaning that the next course was an order of a pasta called love letters, sweetbreads, and halibut, and the pasta chef would answer back, "Love," and Dom, the sauté chef, would answer, "Sweetie, Butt"—a sequence of words that, if listened to with any detachment, seemed to constitute a narrative in their own right. Or: "Bar loser tender," which meant that there

FIRST TASTES BY NORA EPHRON

A SANDWICH

The hot pastrami sandwich served at Langer's Delicatessen in downtown Los Angeles is the finest hot pastrami sandwich in the world. This is not just my opinion, although most people who know about Langer's will simply say it's the finest hot pastrami sandwich in Los Angeles because they don't dare to claim that something like a hot pastrami sandwich could possibly be the best version of itself in a city where until recently you couldn't get anything resembling a New York bagel, and the only reason you can get one now is that New York bagels have deteriorated.

Langer's is a medium-sized place—it seats a hundred and thirty-five people—and it is decorated, although "decorated" is probably not the word that applies, in tufted brown vinyl. The view out the windows is of the intersection of Seventh and Alvarado and the bright-red-and-yellow signage of a Hispanic neighborhood—bodegas, check-cashing storefronts, and pawnshops. Just down the block is a spot notorious for being the place to go in L.A. if you need a fake I.D. The Rampart division's main police station, the headquarters of the city's second-most-recent police scandal, is a mile away. Even in 1947, when Langer's opened, the neighborhood was not an obvious place for an old-style Jewish delicatessen, but in the early nineties things got worse. Gangs moved in. The crime rate rose. The Langers—the founder, Al, now eighty-nine, and his son Norm, fifty-seven—were forced to cut the number of employees, close the restaurant nights and Sundays, and put coin-operated locks on the restroom doors. The opening of the Los Angeles subway system—one of its stops is half a block from the restaurant—has helped business slightly, as has the option of having your sandwich brought out to your car. But Langer's always seems to be just barely hanging on. If it were in New York, it would be a shrine, with lines around the block and tour buses standing double-parked outside. Pilgrims would come—as they do, for example, to Arthur Bryant's in Kansas City and Sonny Bryan's in Dallas—and they would report on their conversion. But in Los Angeles a surprising number of people don't even know about Langer's, and many of those who do wouldn't be caught dead at the corner of Seventh and Alvarado, even though it's not a particularly dangerous intersection during daytime hours.

LANGER'S
DELI

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

Pastrami, I should point out for the uninitiated, is made from a cut of beef that is brined like corned beef, coated with pepper and an assortment of spices, and then smoked. It is characterized by two things. The first is that it is not something anyone's mother whips up and serves at home; it's strictly restaurant fare, and it's served exclusively as a sandwich, usually on Russian rye bread with mustard. The second crucial thing about pastrami is that it is almost never good. In fact, it usually tastes like a bunch of smoked rubber bands.

The Langers buy their pastrami from a supplier in Burbank. "When we get it, it's edible," Norm Langer says, "but it's like eating a racquetball. It's hard as a rock. What do we do with it? What makes us such wizards? The average delicatessen will take this piece of meat and put it into a steamer for thirty to forty-five minutes and warm it. But you've still got a hard piece of rubber. You haven't broken down the tissues. You haven't made it tender. We take that same piece of pastrami, put it into our steamer, and steam it for almost three hours. It will shrink twenty-five to thirty per cent, but it's now tender—so tender it can't be sliced thin in a machine because it will fall apart. It has to be hand-sliced."

So: tender and hand-sliced. That's half the secret of the Langer's sandwich. The other secret is the bread. The bread is hot. Years ago, in the nineteen-thirties, Al Langer owned a delicatessen in Palm Springs, and, because there were no Jewish bakers in the vicinity, he was forced to bus in the rye bread. "I was serving day-old bread," Al Langer says, "so I put it into the oven to make it fresher. Hot crispy bread. Juicy soft pastrami. How can you lose?"

Today, Langer's buys its rye bread from a bakery called Fred's, on South Robertson, which bakes it on bricks until it's ten minutes from being done. Langer's bakes the loaf the rest of the way, before slicing it hot for sandwiches. The rye bread, faintly sour, perfumed with caraway seeds, lightly dusted with cornmeal, is as good as any rye bread on the planet, and Langer's puts about seven ounces of pastrami on it, the proper proportion of meat to bread. The resulting sandwich, slathered with Gulden's mustard, is an exquisite combination of textures and tastes. It's soft but crispy, tender but chewy, peppery but sour, smoky but tangy. It's a symphony orchestra, different instruments brought together to play one perfect chord. It costs eight-fifty and is, in short, a work of art. ♦

was a person at the bar alone (the loser) who had ordered a pork tenderloin.

I had been at the grill for nearly two months when I had, in the kitchen's phrasing, my first experience of being "hammered." It was June, the hot beginning of a hot summer. The menu had changed again. Lamb shanks and short ribs had been dropped. The duck was being served not with barley but with a cherry compote and a cherry vinaigrette. Accompanying the branzino was a nine-herb salad. I made it one afternoon with Andy, trimming off stems: chive and chamomile flowers, parsley, chervil, oregano, lovage, celery leaves, the fluffy fur from baby bronze fennel, and something called "salad burnet"—an explosion of summer greenness.

Evidently, when it gets hot people want to order from the grill, the hottest part of the kitchen. It was ninety-three degrees when I arrived that day. Once the service starts, the air-conditioning vent over the grill is closed, because it disturbs the flames and dries out the resting meat. I was told to line up pitchers of water, and at five-thirty there was the sound of the ticker machine. "Game time," Memo Trevino, one of the sous-chefs, said. A chart prepared by the maître d' said that nearly two hundred and fifty people were expected. It turned out to be more, and the biggest number arrived in the first ninety minutes.

One of the mysteries of a restaurant is that there is almost always one thing or another that everyone seems to order, and you never know what it's going to be. One night, everyone wanted duck or branzino, and Dom and I were the busiest chefs in the kitchen—there were twenty-five branzinos and twenty-three ducks. It was a hot night, and I understood the appeal of grilled fish. But why duck? One evening, it was rabbit. Then: no rabbit. Tonight, it was lamb chops, mainly cooked medium (medium rare was easier to feel, and well done was easiest of all—you just killed it).

"Ordering branzino, two lamb medium, one lamb well done, one lamb m.r.," Andy called out.

I answered, "Branzino, two lamb medium, one well done, and one m.r." Why, I remember thinking, does one go to an Italian restaurant and order lamb chops? They were served with Jerusalem artichokes, red onions in vinegar, a red-pepper coulis, lemon, mint, and a spicy yogurt; that is, all the elements of fruit and citrus and heat that you'd expect from a Mario dish. But they were, finally, just lamb chops.

A lamb chop has fat along the rib, and, once you've grilled both sides, you roll it onto the rib to render the fat away. At one point, there was so much fat the grill caught fire. Although you're cooking your meat above a flame, you don't want a fire—the taste is black plastic—but I was told to let it burn and avoid the flame; it was the only way to get rid of so much fat. And that was when the orders started.

"Ordering!" Andy sang out. "Two lamb medium, squab, two tenders, rib eye!" And I spun around, dipped into the lowboy refrigerator, loaded up one arm, spun back, dropped the meat on a tray, and seasoned it. I lined up the chops on the grill, in two rows of five, all pointing to the right, flopped the tenderloins into a corner, put on the rib eye, but hadn't got to the squab when I heard the ticker tape. "Ordering three branzino and two lamb medium m.r." The same routine: seasoned the lamb chops, lined them up, pointing to the right, different spot from the first batch (which I'd turned now and which were pointing to the left), because these were medium rare. But what was I to do with the branzino? There was no room.

The ticker tape again. "Ordering three lamb medium, branzino, rabbit." More? I stopped what I was doing—I had to get the new orders on the tray where I seasoned the meat, at least that, because otherwise I was going to forget them with the next batch of orders. Uncooked meat was stacking up because there was no room on the grill.

Again the ticker tape. This was starting to feel like an athletic event. I was hot—sweat dripping off my nose—and moving as quickly as my concentration allowed, flipping, turning, poking, being burned, one row pointing to the right, another to the left, poking again, stacking up meat here, rushing over the branzinos that had been waiting for a spot, turning, the flames in the corner of the grill still burning, fed by the fat cascading off the new orders. It was exhilarating and frightening (what happens if I fall behind?) and physical and just plain weird. And still the orders kept coming—lamb medium, lamb m.r. What's wrong with these people? I was surrounded by meat. Meat on the grill. Meat on the seasoning tray. Meat on the resting tray, in big heaps. So much meat that it no longer seemed like meat. Or maybe it seemed exactly like meat. It was tissue and muscle and sinews. And still more orders.

"This is the buzz," the sous-chef told me later. "This is the fun part," Mark, my grill coach, said. "This is what you live for," Andy told me. "It feels really fucking good." I was finally discovering what Mario had described to me as "the reality of the kitchen"—a roomful of adrenaline addicts.

And then, as suddenly, it slowed down, and the evening's first cycle was finishing.

It would repeat itself three more times—three "hits," the last at eleven-thirty—but now there was a break.

During a slow period, someone made food. I often had pasta (because of the way the dough was worked—for nearly an hour, which raised the level of gluten—the pasta had an unusual tenderness and elasticity; it was like some kind of perfectly cooked vegetable, certainly not like normal pasta, and I regarded it as a privilege to eat it, even while standing). Tacos were the kitchen favorite, made with tenderloin scraps or steak, or, once, with beef tongues. These were surprising moments, happy collegial meals, the chefs leaning against a counter, eating off the same plate, talking in English and Spanish. And then the ticker-tape machine started up.

I'd got a message that friends had appeared in the dining room, and I prepared to meet them. I had to cool off first. I doused myself with ice water, put a cold towel on my head, and stood in the walk-in. Steam was pouring through the heavy cotton chef's jacket. I removed my head band, and Dom walked in and hooted with laughter. I was standing in a hot foggy cloud, trying not to move. I changed my jacket and got a new apron. I had the thought that if cooking is the transfer of heat then the real cooking wasn't at the grill or on the flat tops; it was the whole kitchen. The kitchen was the heat source. I washed my face again and walked out into the dining room, so civilized, filled with well-dressed couples, and I asked myself, "What's wrong with them, that they all want to eat lamb chops?"

Except for Mario, who spends most of his evenings in the dining room, usually at the bar, prominently placed so that everyone entering and leaving the restaurant sees him (most people want to see him; it's a feature of their visit), few chefs leave the kitchen. It's too disorienting; the cultures of serving and being served are too different. Chefs' hours are unsocial—they work when others play; they work to allow others to play, preparing meals that they're not earning enough to purchase. It's easier to remain in the kitchen—the contradictions never come to the surface. I saw the cooks go into the dining room only once. The maître d' had popped in with news. "Hooker on Table 24," he said, and, one by one, the male chefs filed out of the kitchen and when they returned debated the woman's price. Holly Burling, a pantry chef, and the only woman working that night, had a look of modest moral confusion. "Do I have to look, too?" she asked me.

"Maybe it's because they're guys in aprons that they have to prove their maleness over and over again," Elisa said one day, not long after one of the chefs, objecting to her suggestion that portions of sweetbread should be six ounces and measured on a scale, said, "No, no. Too much work. Just call them B-cups"—and he grabbed his own breasts to illustrate the concept. "Everyone here knows what a B-cup is."

The kitchen exaggerated people—in that small hot box of a work space. It was as if, pressed together, you were outside the normal social order. People behaved differently. More sexist, cruder, harder, sometimes verging on violence. I found that I liked it: I think most people in the kitchen did—it had a blunt, unapologetic reality.

Ever since Mario gave up Pó, he has seemed, at times, like a man so fiercely driven by the next thing that you wonder how he keeps it all in his head. He is a father now (with two boys, four and almost six), and so is his partner, Joe Bastianich; it was in celebration of this that they named their first venture together Babbo, which means Papa. The two then opened two more Manhattan restaurants—a Roman-style trattoria called Lupa and a theatre-district place devoted to fish, called Esca. This was followed by a wine store, Italian Wine Merchants. Now Batali wants a Spanish restaurant (Andy Nusser will run it). In June, he and Bastianich got the lease on a space at 1 Fifth Avenue, right around the corner from Babbo (it will open in October, as a pizzeria called Otto). The same month, the two bought land in Italy for a vineyard.

Batali needs the excitement of new ventures, of having to be always stimulated, I thought, when one evening he disappeared—ran over to one of the other restaurants, popped into the kitchen, had a drink at the bar, rushed back to the Babbo dining room ("Oh, they're needy tonight"), and then made his way to the kitchen.

In the kitchen Mario is different. He is no longer Molto Mario. He is not performing, and he doesn't have an audience. He is focussed, unsmiling because he doesn't need to smile, taciturn because there's no need to be chatty, and utterly at ease. In most situations, Mario has the impish look of a class clown, slightly mischievous, teasing: whatever he's going to do next, it's going to charm you, and he knows that it will. In the kitchen, there's no clown act, no clown mask, and no charm. His face is relaxed, transparent. He can be rude with impunity. He is often moody, and, in a kitchen so small, with so many people crushed into it, his moods affect the other cooks, who become irritable and difficult, long after Mario has left.

His view is that he doesn't really have to be there, and yet he should be there, nevertheless—simply to know what's going on. And while it's true that a restaurant loses its focus when the chef isn't in the kitchen, Mario is there for another reason, too. It's his retreat, the place where he can simply be Mario. He is happiest when he is preparing food—the mysterious pleasure of bringing pleasure to others. ♦

"Since the food you serve is not organically grown, is it safe to assume that the meat is laced with antibiotics and the salad is chockful of pesticides?"

FIRST TASTES BY JANET MALCOLM

AS THE FRENCH DO

> With the left hand, hold an asparagus upright in the heart of an artichoke while a wall of the sauce is built around it with the right hand.—*"The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook."*

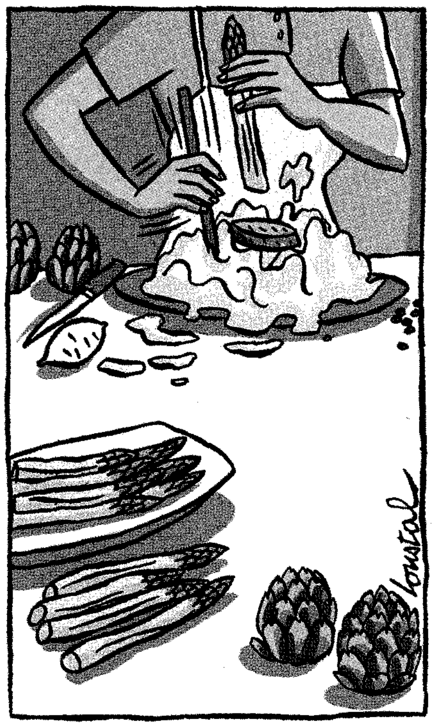
How can a sauce be a wall? Why does Toklas swerve from the hortatory to the passive in mid-sentence? To answer these questions, it is necessary to cook the dish called Hearts of Artichokes à la Isman Bavaldy, which Toklas offers as an example of French haute cuisine on pages 11-12 of her cookbook. It was, she tells us, one of the courses in a nine-course lunch for sixteen at a fashionable French home to which she and Gertrude Stein had been invited, and which included Aspic de Foie Gras, Salmon Sauce Hollandaise, Hare à la Royale, Pheasants Roasted with Truffles, Lobster à la Française, Singapore Ice Cream, cheese, and fruit.

"It does not take as long as it sounds to prepare this dish," Toklas writes of Hearts of Artichokes à la Isman Bavaldy, and she is right. The recipe is actually harder to read than the dish is to prepare. There are so many steps that one cannot take them in; one's eyes glaze over, one's thoughts wander. However, shopping for the ingredients (which Toklas doesn't list—you just bump into them as you read) refocusses the mind. The ingredients are: artichokes, asparagus, lemons, cardamom seeds, sweetbreads, shallots, coriander seeds, butter, flour, dry champagne, and bread crumbs.

You cook the artichokes in water to which lemon juice, cardamom seeds, and salt have been added, and then remove the leaves and put them aside. They are not part of the dish. ("The leaves can be scraped with a silver spoon and mixed with a little cream to be used in an omelette or under mirrored eggs," Toklas writes, trying to be helpful, but only adding to the forbidding length of the recipe.) Then you boil the asparagus until it is just tender, and cut each spear "within 2 inches of the tip."

Earlier, you have started to deal with the sweetbreads. Toklas says to soak them in cold water for an hour; boil them for twenty minutes with salt, shallots, coriander seeds; plunge them into cold water; "remove tubes and skin" (very messy); and, finally, put them through a strainer with a potato masher. I found that unworkable and made a mush of them in the Cuisinart. Next, you sauté the sweetbread mush in butter, and add flour and then champagne. "Cook gently until this sauce becomes stiff."

And now comes the improbable (and, as it proved, impossible) building of the wall of sauce. Toklas's wobbly sentence clearly expresses the anxiety of the moment and subtly enacts the disparity between what the two hands are doing: the left hand confidently clutching the asparagus spear, the right hand helplessly plastering its base with the sauce, which no amount of cooking can make into the cementlike substance needed to hold the spear upright when the left hand releases it. The recipe called for twelve artichoke hearts. I cooked six, and six times failed to keep the asparagus from drooping miserably into the pool of sauce gathering in and messily spilling out of the artichoke heart. There was no way to make the dish presentable.



Well, was it good? No. The champagne (two cups of it), and a final browning with buttered bread crumbs, muddied the delicate taste of the sweetbread, and the asparagus and artichoke hearts similarly had no reason for being together—they cancelled out each other's virtue. Nor could you taste the cardamom and coriander seeds. The dish took about two hours to prepare, three minutes to serve to game friends, who politely pushed it around on their plates, and ten seconds to throw out.

But the first time I cooked from "The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook," in 1954, the year of its publication, when it was given to me for my birthday by an arty friend, was to quite different effect. Seven years had yet to pass before the appearance of "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," and, like most people living in pre-Julia America, I had never eaten real French food. Thus, when I took my first bite of the coq au vin I had made from Toklas's recipe, on page 149, I could hardly credit my senses. I was stunned by the suave deliciousness of what I had produced. In all my life, I had never eaten anything of such complex and rich, and yet clear and pure, flavor. It was a moment of astonished rapture, one that I will never forget.

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

When I decided to cook the dish again recently, I doubted that the moment would be repeated. In 2002, Americans no longer need to be told, as Toklas told us with great condescension in 1954, that "the French never add Tabasco, ketchup or Worcestershire sauce, nor do they eat any of innumerable kinds of pickles, nor do they accompany a meat course with radishes, olives or salted nuts. . . . To cook as the French do one must respect the quality and flavor of the ingredients." (When I first read these words, I was properly awed by them. I had not yet made Hearts of Artichokes à la Isman Bavaldy.)

But Toklas's coq au vin—or "Cock in Wine," as she called it for the sake of her radish-eating American readers—remains wonderful. The combination of fowl, pork lardoons, butter, carrots, shallots, onions, wine, brandy, and mushrooms is as felicitous as the combination of artichokes, asparagus, and sweetbread mush is ridiculous. It differs in one respect from the usual coq-au-vin recipe: Toklas uses white wine instead of red for the sauce, and I, for one, think this is a good idea. But in either manifestation coq au vin remains one of the glories of French bourgeois cuisine. The butter and pork fat aren't good for the heart, but the dish is good for the soul.

Below, I reprint Toklas's appealingly short recipe—its brevity and the ordinariness of the ingredients were what attracted me to it in 1954—followed by a sort of hovering Jewish mother's version for use in 2002.

Cock in Wine No. 1

Cut a young cock or a young chicken in serving pieces. In an enamel-lined pot melt 3 tablespoons butter, add 3/4 cup diced side fat of pork, 6 small onions, 4 shallots and 1 medium sized carrot cut in thin slices. Brown these in butter. Remove and place pieces of chicken in pot and brown over high heat. Add salt, pepper and 2 cloves of crushed garlic. Remove the browned pork fat, onions, shallots and carrot. Heat 3 tablespoons brandy, light and pour into pot. Sprinkle 3/4 tablespoon flour into the pot. Stir with a wooden spoon for 2 or 3 minutes, then add 1 cup fresh mushrooms and 1 cup hot good dry white wine. Increase heat, add pork fat and vegetables. Cook uncovered for 1/4 hour. Serve very hot.

Cock in Wine No. 2

Buy four pieces of chicken and as small a slab of pork fat or bacon as you can find. Fill a cup to the 3/4 mark with pork fat you have diced into small pieces. Heat 1 tablespoon butter in a heavy enamelled or stainless casserole, and sauté the pork pieces until brown. Remove to a side dish. Add another tablespoon of butter to the pot (if needed) and sauté 12 small white onions, 8 large quartered shallots, and 4 sliced carrots until lightly browned. Remove and add to the side dish with two cloves of crushed garlic. Rub chicken pieces with salt and pepper, and brown over medium-high flame in the fat left in pot; then remove. Pour 3 tablespoons brandy into pot and light. When flames subside, add 3/4 tablespoon of flour and stir with a wooden spoon for about a minute over very low heat. Add one and a half to two cups dry white wine, then return chicken and vegetables and pork pieces to the pot. Cook covered over low heat for half an hour or until the chicken is properly done. While the chicken is cooking, sauté 4 or 5 sliced mushrooms in 1 tablespoon butter over high heat. Add them to the pot in the last five minutes of cooking. Taste the sauce—it will probably need salt. Serve with boiled new potatoes. ♦

A wine-business friend points out that wine is way beyond any other subject in inspiring an urge to refute the notion of expertise.

ANNALS OF TASTE

THE RED AND THE WHITE

Is it possible that wine connoisseurs can't tell them apart?

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

Before we get onto the question of whether experienced wine drinkers can actually tell the difference between red wine and white, I should probably tell you a little something about my background in the field. I have never denied that when I'm trying to select a bottle of wine in a liquor store I'm strongly influenced by the picture on the label. (I like a nice mountain, preferably in the middle distance.) When I was growing up, in Kansas City, Missouri, I didn't know about people drinking wine at meals that were not being eaten in celebration of a major anniversary. I assume that my neighbors would have been as startled as I to hear about such carryings on. Years later, after I'd moved to New York, a newspaperman in my home town did me a great favor, and when I wondered aloud what I could get for him, a friend in New York—a sophisticated friend, who considered himself something of a gourmet, now that I think of it—said that a case of wine was always appreciated. I phoned the newspaperman's son-in-law in Kansas City to ask if he could find out, discreetly, what sort of wine was particularly fancied in his in-laws' house, and the son-in-law got back to me with a question of his own: "Does Wild Turkey count?" These days, I do drink wine, although if I'm at a meal at which drink orders are being given by the glass, I am likely to say to the waiter, "What sort of fancy beer do you have on tap?"

I have spent a certain amount of time in the company of wine cognoscenti, but I wouldn't claim that I have distinguished myself on those occasions. Many years ago, for instance, a winemaker I know was kind enough to invite me to the "barrel tasting" of California wines which used to be held annually at the Four Seasons restaurant, in New York—an event that was considered a very hot ticket in the wine game. At the table, many glasses of wine were put in front of us. Then someone who had his mouth very close to the microphone talked about each wine in what I believe scholars would call excruciating detail—the type of vines that had been grafted together to produce it, for instance, and how long it had been in stainless-steel vats or oak barrels. Displaying manners that I thought would have made my mother proud, I drank what was placed before me—not noticing, as I glanced around to see whether more food was ever going to appear, that everyone else was just sipping. I have since heard two or three versions of what transpired that evening, but they do not differ in whether or not I fell asleep at the table. Particularly considering my performance at the Four Seasons that evening, it's perfectly possible that some people asked to sum up my knowledge of and attitude toward wine might respond "ignorance, tempered slightly by philistinism."

On the other hand, I have, in a manner of speaking, worked in the wine industry for a number of years. An old friend named Bruce Neyers makes wine in the Napa Valley. I think it would be too much to say that I'm an adviser to Bruce in his business, unless suggesting that he put a mountain on his label counts. Thanks to the miracle of the fax machine, though, I act as a sort of volunteer copy editor of the announcements that he sends out to his regular customers—what people in the trade would call his "offering letters." Bruce, a wry man who grew up in Wilmington, Delaware, and assumed through college that he would spend his life as a research chemist for DuPont, tends to discuss wine in straightforward terms even when he's addressing the sort of wine fiends who do close readings of offering letters. Still, I can't claim that I know precisely what he means when he writes, say, "The malolactic fermentation went to completion." What I bring to my editing task is not expertise in viticulture but a long experience in such matters as comma placement.

If Bruce shows up at my house during a business trip to New York, he is usually carrying some wine, a custom that reflects both his natural generosity and his concern about what he otherwise might be forced to drink. He has never considered my scenery-selection strategy a completely satisfactory way to build a cellar. He has particularly grim memories of a Chardonnay that attracted me with a view of mountains that are apparently near enough the grape-growing region of the Hungarian Danube to be depicted in the middle distance. He doesn't ask in advance if I'd prefer red or white—presumably because he knows that the question would give me the opportunity to say, "But can anybody really tell the difference?"

Why? Because, as best I can remember, it was from Bruce or one of his acquaintances in the Napa Valley that I first heard about the color test given at the University of California at Davis, whose Department of Viticulture and Enology is renowned in the wine world. I got the impression that the Test was often given to visitors from the wine industry, but since this was about twenty years ago, such details are hazy. I was definitely told, though, that the folks at Davis poured wine that was at room temperature into black glasses—thus removing the temperature and color cues that are a large part of what people assume is taste—and that the tasters often couldn't tell red wine from white. After Bruce returned from a short course at Davis in the mid-seventies, he had someone at the Joseph Phelps winery, where he then worked, set up a red-white test with

RUVEN AFANADOR

black glasses. Bruce got three out of five.

I suppose I am programmed to expect that sort of result. I was raised by a man who, although he had never tasted coffee in his life, once told me that blindfolded I couldn't tell the difference between coffee with milk and coffee without milk. It has never occurred to me that the software drummers who are in the habit of saying to the bartender "J. & B. on the rocks" or "Ketel One with a twist" might actually be able to recognize their favorite booze in a blind tasting. Many years ago, when a friend in England began raising chickens and boasting of the gloriously distinctive taste of their eggs, I secretly replaced the freshly gathered eggs in his larder with eggs from a London supermarket, and I try to remind him at least semi-annually that he raved about the next omelette to come out of the kitchen. In temperament and genes as well as in geographic origin, I'm from the Show Me state.

For years, I was likely to mention the Davis test whenever the subject of wine connoisseurship came up, even if I happened to be drinking a glass of beer at the time. A couple of years ago, for instance, a pleasant young man who was showing us around a winery owned by an acquaintance of mine in New York State mentioned that, as part of his final year at the Culinary Institute of America, he had gone to Davis for a six-week wine course. Naturally, I asked him how he did on the Test. He changed the subject. But at the end of the tour, after we'd all downed a friendly glass of wine or two and become better acquainted, he suddenly turned to me and said, quietly, "I got three out of seven."

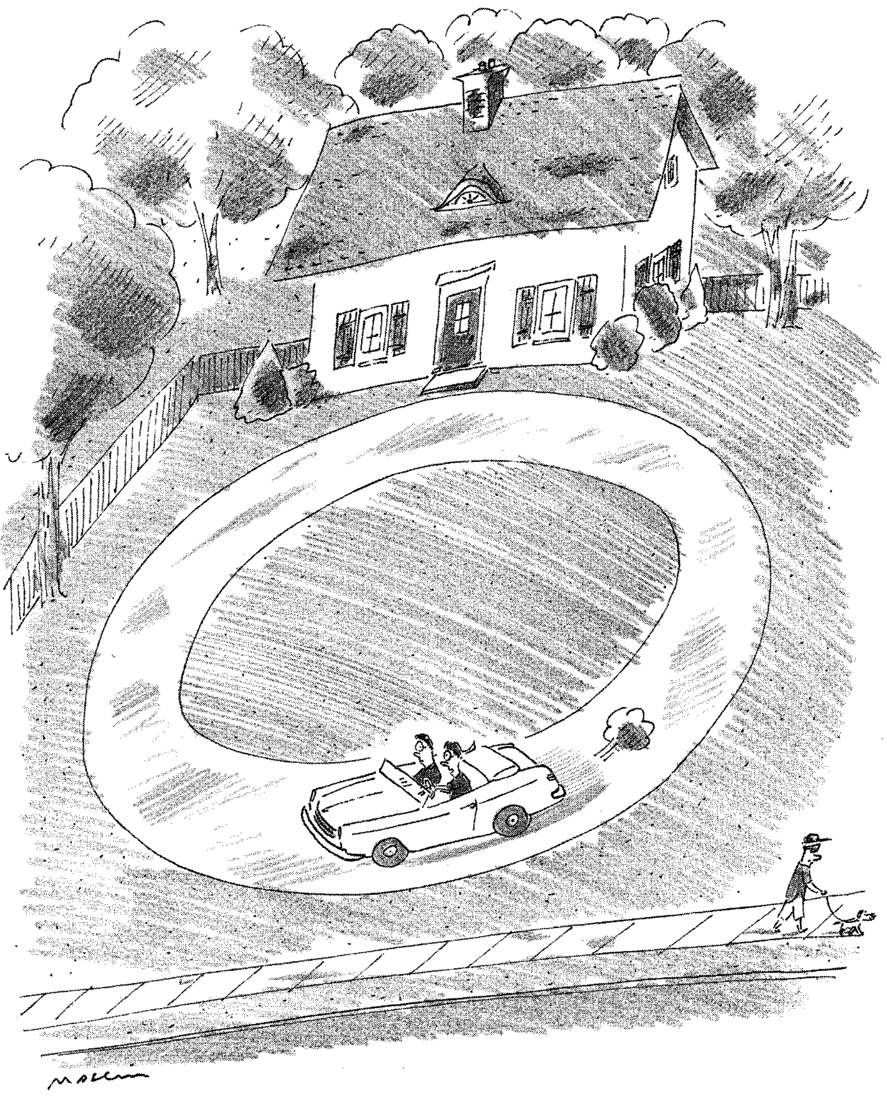
"I'm working on Plan B."

I know what you're thinking: Is it possible that a self-confessed beer-swilling ignoramus got interested in the Davis test simply as a way of debunking wine connoisseurship? As another wine-business friend likes to point out, wine is way beyond any other subject in inspiring in the American layman an urge to refute the notion of expertise. (Modern art must come in second.) I'd like to think that I'm above that sort of thing. I took it for granted that experts could explain not only why certain red wines and certain white wines would be difficult for even a connoisseur to tell apart but also why that did not call into question the legitimacy of wine expertise—and could do so, if necessary, in excruciating detail.

Also, it's not as if wine connoisseurship lacks informed criticism from people who are not beer-swilling ignoramuses. Marc Dornan, of the Beverage Testing Institute, for instance, says to anyone who asks him that rating wines on a hundred-point scale, which is now common practice, is "utterly pseudoscientific." Tim Hanni, a Master of Wine, believes that most commentary about wines fails to take into account the biological individuality of consumers; he claims that he can predict what sort of wine appeals to you according to such factors as how heavily you salt your food and whether your mother suffered a lot from morning sickness while carrying you. Hanni has said for years that the matching of a particular wine with a particular food is a scam, there being "absolutely no premise historically, culturally, or biologically for drinking red wine with meat." As a way of illustrating the role played by anticipation in taste, Frédéric Brochet, who is a researcher with the enology faculty of the University of Bordeaux, recently asked some experts to describe two wines that appeared by their labels to be a distinguished *grand-cru classe* and a cheap table wine—actually, Brochet had refilled both bottles with a third, mid-level wine—and found his subjects mightily impressed by the supposed *grand cru* and dismissive of the same wine when it was in the *vin ordinaire* bottle.

An urge to refute the notion of expertise certainly seemed to be reflected in the headline of an article from the *Times* of London about the research Brochet has been carrying on—"CHEEKY LITTLE TEST EXPOSES WINE 'EXPERTS' AS WEAK AND FLAT." The headline caught the tone of the article, by Adam Sage, which began, "Drinkers have long suspected it, but now French researchers have finally proved it: wine 'experts' know no more than the rest of us." The test of Brochet's that caught my eye consisted partly of asking wine drinkers to describe what appeared to be a white wine and a red wine. They were in fact two glasses of the same white wine, one of which had been colored red with flavorless and odorless dye. The comments about the "red" wine used what people in the trade call red-wine descriptors. "It is a well known psychological phenomenon—you taste what you're expecting to taste," Brochet said in the *Times*. "They were expecting to taste a red wine and so they did. . . . About two or three per cent of people detect the white wine flavour, but invariably they have little experience of wine culture. Connoisseurs tend to fail to do so. The more training they have, the more mistakes they make because they are influenced by the color of the wine."

Reading about Brochet's color experiment revived my interest in the Davis test. I was curious, for one thing, about whether there was a way to compare his results with the results the Davis people had collected over the years—although, as I understood it, the Davis testers, working in the straightforward tradition of the American West, told a subject that he was choosing between red and white rather than trying to sneak a bottle of adulterated white past him. I decided it might be time to visit Davis and collect some statistics on what the Test actually showed. I got the Department of Viticulture and Enology on the telephone and explained my interest to a friendly woman there who is employed to field inquiries from people like me. She told me that as far as she knew Davis had never conducted such a test.



"It's not a complaint—I'm just saying we used to get out and do a lot more before we built the circular driveway."

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"Imagine that!" Bruce Neyers said, when I told him of my chat with the folks at Davis. He found it unsurprising that an institution with an interest in the distinctions among wines would have difficulty recalling evidence that the most elementary distinction can often not be made. Like a lot of wine people I've spoken to about the Test over the years, Bruce thinks it would be easy enough to pick out some unusual wines that might muddy the difference between the taste of red and white; that is presumably what was done in the test he'd taken years ago at Phelps. But even a loaded test might be pounced on as evidence that the judgments of wine experts are, as Adam Sage put it in his *Times* of London piece, "little more than self-delusion." When I asked Bruce if he could round up some Napa Valley wine people to take the red-white test, assuming I couldn't track it down at Davis, he said they might want to remain anonymous, since there were probably better ways to begin a wine-industry résumé than "Although I can't distinguish red wine from white wine . . ."

If anybody at Davis knew about a red-white test, I'd been told, it would probably be Ann Noble, who, at the time I dropped in to see her, was just winding up a twenty-eight-year teaching career in the Department of Viticulture and Enology. Professor Noble's field is taste and smell, particularly smell. She has noted that as children we are taught to label colors but not smells. In an effort to correct that oversight, she not only conducted in her courses what she calls "a kindergarten of the nose" but also invented the Wine Aroma Wheel, which permits someone to describe the aroma of a wine in specific terms and to identify varietals by their smell. Someone with an aroma wheel knows, for instance, that a Pinot Noir can be distinguished from a Zinfandel because it has the smell of berry, berry jam (strawberry), vanilla, butter, and spiciness rather than the smell of berry, black pepper, raisin, soy, butter, and vanilla.

Professor Noble told me that the test I'd heard about sounded like an urban myth. She regularly tested her students at the end of the semester by asking them to identify wine in black glasses, she said. But what they were trying to name was the varietal, not the color. For a couple of years, she kept track of wrong answers, and she found that perhaps five to ten per cent of them were not simply the wrong varietal but a wrong varietal that was also the wrong color. Conceivably, it occurred to me, that test could have been embellished over the years to become the Davis test I'd heard about, although five or ten per cent amounted to a lot fewer wrong answers than I would have expected. Then Professor Noble told me that in the tests she gave her students they were, of course, reaching their conclusions by smell alone.

"Smell alone?" I said.

"This is only by smell," she said. "The minute you put it in your mouth, it's game over. The difference is night and day."

She could imagine some wines that would be less obvious—Beaujolais, for instance, has less tannin than most red wines—but basically she thought that the astringency of red wine would be a giveaway if you were allowed to taste as well as smell. She offered to demonstrate this on the spot, and after ducking across the hall into her lab she returned with two wines in black glasses for me to taste. I tried both of them, and then I said, "The first one was red and the second one was white."

Professor Noble seemed taken aback. "It was the other way around," she said.

She was kind enough to come up with some mitigating circumstances. "It could have been test anxiety," she said. Then she tasted the wines and added, "I should have gotten a different red wine. This is not as astringent as I thought." Then she said that the red was, in fact, a weird wine, from Georgia. She didn't mean Georgia as in Tbilisi, where wine consumption is among the highest in the world; she meant Georgia as in Waycross. Then she mentioned that I hadn't had a warmup taste.

I tried to help her think of other excuses. I told her the sun was in my eyes. I thought I'd reserve my other standard excuse—the ball hit a pebble—just in case she suggested that we do the Test again.

Professor Noble said she'd ask around among other faculty members whose concerns were most likely to have included a red-white test, but by the weekend of the test that Bruce Neyers had agreed to set up she had e-mailed me that no one at Davis seemed to know about such a test. (Neither, it later turned out, did the people in charge of the Culinary Institute of America's six-week California course that our winery guide had apparently been referring to.) By chance, both of my sons-in-law, Brian and Alex, were in San Francisco that weekend, and they were willing to act as tasters. Both of them have some interest in wine. My daughters, neither of whom drinks much wine, opted out; when we discussed the test over dinner in San Francisco the night before we were to drive up to Bruce's house, someone suggested that the sort of wine descriptors my younger daughter would use if asked to taste two wines might be "yucky" and "yuckier." Both of my sons-in-law seemed pretty free of test anxiety. "I'm not worried about failing," Alex said, partway through dinner. "I'm worried about failing and Brian passing."

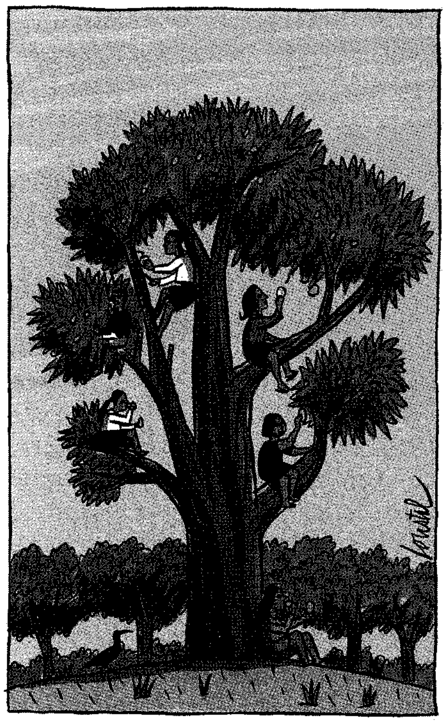
Rather than repeat the sort of test he'd taken years before, Bruce had avoided wines he considered particularly likely to fool the tasters; he had gathered eight French wines that he thought of as typical products of the grapes they'd been made from. Not wanting to skew the results, I didn't mention what Ann Noble had told me about the way to increase your odds—take about three sips instead of one, building up the astringency of the tannin if it's red wine to produce a drying sensation in your mouth which would be hard to miss. As Bruce stood where he couldn't be observed and poured the wine into black glasses, he said that a couple of visiting wine retailers from Springfield, Missouri, sometimes known as the Gateway to the Ozarks, had dropped in just before we arrived and identified eight out of eight wines. Although he insisted he was telling the truth, I figured he was trying to make Brian and Alex nervous with some sort of Napa Valley version of trash talk, and I tried to keep them calm. "I want you to know that I'm totally evenhanded on this," I said to them. "Either one of you guys can be humiliated. I don't care which one it is."

As it turned out, they both did pretty well. Each person, wearing sunglasses as an added security measure, was asked to go through the wines twice—once trying to identify the color by smell, and then by taste. Alex got seven out of eight both times. Brian got only four by taste, but he got six by smell. By taste, both of them misidentified as white a Sancerre rouge made from Pinot Noir grapes in the Loire Valley. That was also one of two wines misidentified when tasted by another guest, Larry Bain, a San Francisco restaurant proprietor considered by Bruce to be knowledgeable in enological matters—which means that if your brother-in-law is particularly arrogant about the sophistication of his palate you might consider keeping a bottle of Reverdy Sancerre rouge on hand, along with a black glass and a pair of sunglasses.

And what other information did the test at Bruce's provide? Taking an average of the three participants I witnessed—if Bruce's earlier guests really were from Missouri, they will understand that I can't count anything I didn't see with my own eyes—I concluded that experienced wine drinkers can tell red from white by taste about seventy per cent of the time, as long as the test is being administered by someone who isn't interested in trying to fool them. That made me wonder whether there were similar statistics somewhere in a file drawer in Davis. If the Test never existed, after all, what test was that young man who showed us around the New York State winery taking when he got three out of seven? What test did I keep hearing about in California all those years? I sometimes ponder these questions when I listen to wine talk while sipping the amber microbrew the waiter brought when I asked him if he had any fancy beers on tap. At least, I think it's an amber microbrew. ♦

FIRST TASTES BY MADHUR JAFFREY

SWEET MEMORY



I was born in my grandparents' sprawling house by the Yamuna River in Delhi. When I was a few minutes old, Grandmother welcomed me into the world by writing "Om," which means "I am" in Sanskrit, on my tongue with a little finger dipped in honey. Perhaps that moment was reinforced in my tiny mind days later when the family priest arrived to draw up my horoscope. As he scribbled astrological symbols on a long scroll, my father named me Madhur, which means "sweet as honey." My grandfather teased my father, saying that he should have named me Manbhari ("am sated"), since I was the fifth child and the third daughter. But my father continued to procreate, and I was left with honey on my palate and in my soul.

My sweet tooth stayed firmly in control until the age of four, when, emulating the appetites of grownups, I began to explore the hot and the sour. My grandfather had built his house in what was once a thriving orchard of jujubes, tamarinds, and mangoes. His numerous grandchildren, like hungry flocks of birds, attacked the mangoes while they were still green and sour. As the grownups snored through the hot summer afternoons in rooms cooled with dampened, sweet-smelling vetiver shades, we climbed up the mango trees, armed with a ground mixture of salt, pepper, red chilies, and roasted cumin. The older children, on the higher branches, peeled and sliced the mangoes with penknives and passed the pieces down to the smaller ones on the lower branches. We dipped them into the spices and ate, our tingling mouths telling us that we had ceased to be babies.

In winter, the vegetable garden came into its own. Around eleven each morning, we were served fresh tomato juice made from our own tomatoes. At about the same time, the gardener offered the ladies sunning themselves on the veranda a basket full of fresh peas, small kohlrabies, white radishes, and feathery chickpea shoots. Some of these we ate raw, and the rest were sent off to the kitchen after a studied appraisal—"Radishes sweeter than last year, no?" As this was the season when the men went hunting, the kitchen was stocked with mallards, geese, quail, partridge, and venison. At dinner, thirty or more family members sat down to venison kebabs spiced with cardamom, tiny quail with hints of cinnamon, chickpea shoots stir-fried with green chilies and ginger, and tiny new potatoes browned with flecks of cumin and mango powder.

Winter was also the season of weddings. My father was in charge of the caterers, and I was his sidekick. In those days, caterers had to cook under family supervision. A dozen of them arrived a few days before the wedding and set up their tent under a tamarind tree. My father examined the raw ingredients. Were the spices wormy? Were there broken grains in the basmati rice? Were the cauliflower heads taut and young? His dark suspicions and the caterers' obsequious reassurances were a dutifully played game. In reality, we loved the caterers, who could conjure up with equal ease the lamb meatballs of our Mogul emperors and the tamarind chutneys of the street. One of their special dishes was made with cauliflower stems. They slit them into quarters and stir-fried them in giant woklike *karhais* with sprinklings of cumin, coriander, chilies, ginger, and lots of sour mango powder. All we had to do was place a stem in our mouths, clamp down with our teeth, and pull. As with artichoke leaves, the spicy flesh remained on our tongues as the coarse skin was drawn away and discarded.

Years later, in New York, I helped my ailing neighbor James Beard teach some of his last classes. One of them was about taste. The students were instructed to sample nine types of caviar and a variety of olive oils, and do a blind identification of meats that had had their fat removed. Toward the end of the class, this big, frail man, who was confined to a high director's chair, said to the students, "Do you think there is such a thing as taste memory?"

This set me thinking. A few years earlier, my husband, a violinist, had been studying the score of Bach's "Chaconne" when a friend asked him, "Can you hear the music as you read it?" It was the same question in a different form. When I left India to study in England, I did not know how to cook, but my palate had recorded hundreds of flavors. From cumin to tamarind, they were all in my head, waiting to be called into service. Rather like my husband, I could hear the honey on my tongue. ♦

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

A REPORTER AT LARGE

RAW FAITH

The nun and the cheese underground.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

If it's all the same to you, Mother Noella Marcellino would rather you didn't call her the cheese nun. It's true that she makes cheese—a New England variation on the unctuous Saint-Nectaire of Auvergne. And, yes, she lives in a Benedictine cloister, the Abbey of Regina Laudis, in Bethlehem, Connecticut. Were you to point out that she just finished filming a documentary in France called "The Cheese Nun," you would not be incorrect. Yet when Noella thinks of herself, which seems to happen only rarely, she does so in terms both more scientific and more spiritual: as an authority on cheese molds, or as a singer of gospel and Gregorian chant. One of her best friends was a blues musician, but that can give rise to its own misconceptions. She was a little miffed, a few years ago, when a French newspaper ran a story headlined "SHE DOES RESEARCH BY DAY AND SINGS BLUES IN THE CHURCHES OF THE JURA BY NIGHT."

Mother Noella has spent twenty-nine of her fifty-one years in the abbey. Although she has occasionally been given permission to travel, she must spend all other nights and many hours of daily prayer behind the wooden scrims and walls of the cloister. In 1985, she took her final vows to remain at Regina Laudis for the rest of her life, earning the title of Mother. Yet her secular interests have only widened and deepened over the years. This winter she is completing a Ph.D. in microbiology, even as she helps shepherd the country through a culture war of an unusual sort: a war of cheese.

The United States has long produced more cheese than any other country: eight and a half billion pounds in 2001 alone, enough to stuff the Sears Tower, like an enormous celery stick, four times over. But for nearly a century that tower of curd has been a purely industrial product—formulated, manufactured, extruded, and dispensed with the kind of machinery usually reserved for making plastic. Only in the past fifteen years has a generation of former lawyers and first-time farmers, dot-com dropouts and back-to-the-landers begun to develop true artisanal cheeses. "American cheesemaking is where winemaking was in the late nineteen-seventies," the food writer Clark Wolf says. "Every time you taste something new, you're shocked at how much better it is." Cheesemakers like Willow Smart, in Milton, Vermont, are creating their own rural traditions—Smart treats her sheep homeopathically and uses llamas to protect them from coyotes—and rivalling Europeans for the first time. Outside Louisville, Kentucky, Judy Schad, of Capriole Farms, makes some of the finest goat cheeses in the world. "The French have seven hundred years of experience, they've got experimental cheese stations, and their milk supply is subsidized," Schad says. "But my Mont St. Francis can kick a French Muenster all the way across the Atlantic."

One essential ingredient in this success is easy to isolate: the raw milk in many artisanal cheeses, unlike the pasteurized milk used by Kraft or Borden, is alive with billions of bacteria. These cultures transform the cheese as it ages, breaking down fats and proteins and giving off esters and other compounds that are the building blocks of flavor and aroma. Of course, bacteria can have less salubrious effects, too: well into the last century, raw milk was a prime breeding ground for tuberculosis and typhoid. Consequently, the Food and Drug Administration has required that all store-bought milk be pasteurized (heated to a hundred and forty-five degrees for thirty minutes, or to a hundred and sixty-one degrees for fifteen seconds), and, since 1947, that all raw-milk cheeses be aged for at least sixty days. The assumption has been that pathogens can't survive in the dry, acid environment of an aged cheese. But six years ago a small study in South Dakota found that *Escherichia coli* could survive the sixty-day limit in Cheddar, and the F.D.A. took part in a study to verify the results. Raw-milk cheese, the study warned, might have to be aged for more than sixty days to be safe—if it can be made safely at all.

The news was even more upsetting to Europeans than it was to Americans. Unaged raw-milk cheese is considered a birthright in France and Italy, yet even before the F.D.A.'s research was complete the United States began pushing for an international ban on raw-milk cheese. Cheesemakers responded by circulating petitions and forming advocacy groups, including a European raw-milk alliance and the International Coalition to Preserve the Right to Choose Your Cheese (now called the Cheese of Choice Coalition). They argued that raw milk is often healthier than pasteurized milk, and that cheese-borne illnesses are extremely rare. But it was hard to sway regulators with talk of tradition and "good bacteria." What was needed was an ally of impeccable character and scientific standing, someone to whom cheesemakers could bring their microbial troubles and ask for guidance. What was needed was a cheese nun.

On a gusty morning in April, Mother Noella strode across the University of Connecticut campus at Storrs, her habit flapping and billowing behind her, her gait both stiff-backed and rollicking. Beneath her white wimple, her plump cheeks were flushed and she peered out with a kind of cockeyed glee. She'd warned me before the ride to the campus that she had a lazy eye, but I thought she was joking until I saw her squinting at the side-view mirror. "Don't be nervous," she said, grabbing the wheel as the car lurched into gear. "That's my blind side anyway." Now, after an eventful parallel-parking ses-

RUVEN AFANADOR/PROP STYLING BY JOCELYNE BEAUDOIN

Mother Noella, who makes her cheese in an old, sawed-off whiskey barrel, has become a standard-bearer in the cheese wars.

"At this time, we have one suspect who's been detained for questioning."

sion, we were going to meet her doctoral adviser, David Benson. "You should have seen me on some of those nights commuting back to the abbey," she said. "Midnight in downtown Hartford, after experiments with ether—that's when it got really interesting."

She let out a raucous laugh and bustled up the stairs of the molecular-and-cell-biology building, toward the labs that have served her as a kind of second cloister for the past ten years. She went past orange biohazard and radioactivity signs, past a virus lab that was off limits to pregnant women, and into a room cluttered with old beakers and calcium-crusted instruments. "The F.B.I. was all over the building next door after September 11th," Benson said, ushering us into his office. "Someone left a sample of anthrax in one of the freezers." He showed us a computer slide show, "Cheese Fungi: Cat Fur and Toad Skin," full of fuzzy and warty-looking cheese rinds, frighteningly magnified. Then Noella took me over to her cubicle. She leafed through a pile of papers on the desk and pulled out a monograph from a recent issue of *Applied and Environmental Microbiology*. N. Marcellino was listed as the first author. "There it is," she said, pointing to a page-long list of molds, each associated with a French region and cheese. "There's a story behind every one of those molds."

For nearly a year in the mid-nineteen-nineties, Noella travelled through France on a Fulbright scholarship. She had wanted to study the history and ecology of French cheese caves, but the field proved so vast that she decided to focus on a single mold: *Geotrichum candidum*, the wrinkly white mold that encases some of the greatest French cheeses. How much, she wondered, did the mold vary from one cave to another? To find out, she crisscrossed the countryside in a secondhand Fiat. She would pull up to a ramshackle farm, introduce herself to a wary local cheesemaker, and ask for a sterile flask's worth of his milk. If she was lucky, and he realized that she wasn't after his secret recipe, he might take her into the underground chamber or natural cave where he ripened his cheese. "It helped that I was a nun," she says. "But it helped even more that I was a cheesemaker."

After nine months and nearly thirty thousand kilometres, Noella had collected a hundred and eighty samples. It took another two years to characterize the molds with genetic and biochemical tests, but the results more than justified the effort: the samples contained dozens of distinct strains of *G. candidum*. Noella had been making and selling cheese at the abbey for twenty years by then. She had always thought that there were good molds (like the white rind on Brie) and there were bad molds (like the bluish fuzz on old bread). But her research showed that those categories concealed whole bestiaries. Each strain had its own appetites, its own ecology, its own biochemical effects. And each mold produced a different cheese.

A Frenchman would hardly be surprised by such diversity—Charles de Gaulle acknowledged it forty years ago when he said, "How can anyone be expected to govern a country with two hundred and forty-six cheeses?" But to Americans it is a revelation. Decades of pasteurized and processed cheese have all but wiped clean our memory of cheese as a living culture, formed and flavored by the grasses in a pasture, the yeasts in the air, the bacteria in a barrel, the molds in a cave. But the new cheesemakers tend to be quick studies.

Last year, at a meeting of the American Cheese Society, in Louisville, Mother Noella and Mother Telchilde, who tends the abbey's cows and has a Ph.D. in animal science, were asked to share their research results. "We brought our microscopes," Noella says. "We thought we could set up in the hall and show the cheesemakers some molds for an hour and a half or so." They ended up sitting in the hotel for seven hours. Cheesemakers came with hunks of rind and tales of infestation. They brought wheels of cheese that had been eaten through by scopulariopsis—an invasive fungus—and rinds that were overgrown by *poils de chat*, the dreaded hair-of-the-cat mold. "It was so touching," Noella says. "These American cheesemakers had no one else to turn to."

For the cheesemakers, though, the true heartaches weren't over cheeses that had gone bad; they were over cheeses that they would never make—at least, not legally. Toward the end of the conference, Noella gave a talk in which she mentioned that her favorite cheese in the world is a Mont d'Or. Made in the high valleys of the Massif du Mont d'Or, on the border between France and Switzerland, this raw-milk cheese is so magnificently molten when ripe that it must be held together by strips of local spruce. Like many of the world's finest cheeses, Mont d'Or can't be sold in America; by the time the cheese has aged sixty days, it has dissolved into a puddle.

After Noella's talk, a young Canadian cheesemaker with bleached-blond hair took her aside. Would she and Mother Telchilde like to come with him? He had something they might like to see.

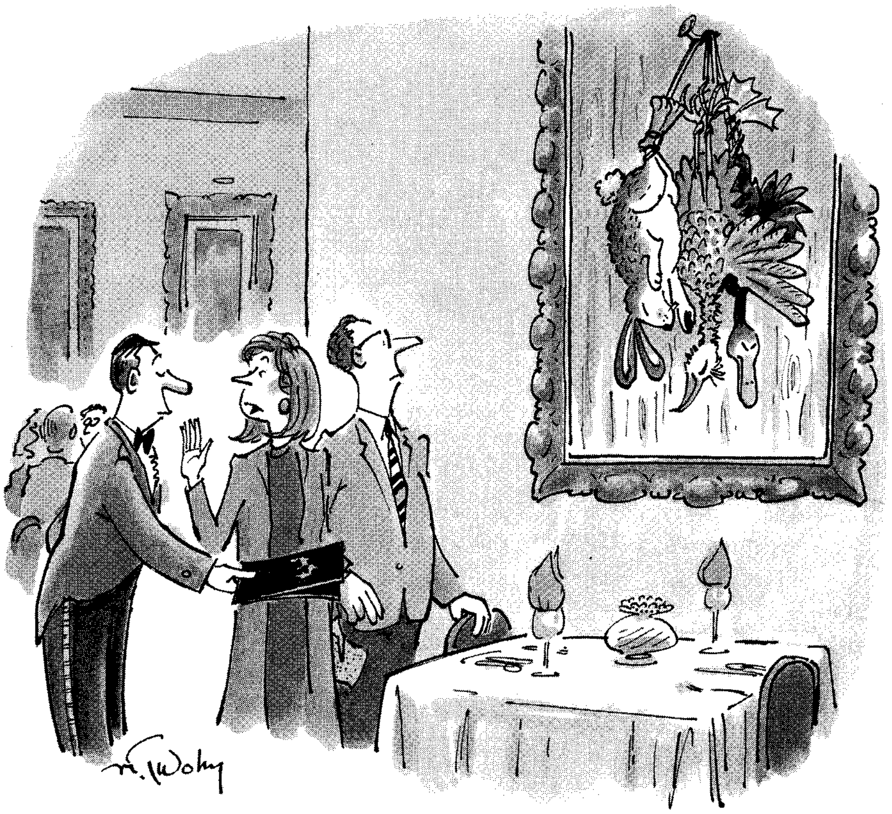
He led them to the hotel's restaurant and through the kitchen, past teams of cooks and servers preparing for the evening rush, to the chef's private office in the back. A few other guests joined them, and the sommelier brought a loaf of bread and a bottle of Bordeaux. Someone closed the door, and then the Canadian pulled out a small wrapped package and placed it on the table. "It was the Mont d'Or," Noella recalls. "He had made it himself and hidden it away like contraband. It was his offering to us."

The existence of a raw-milk underground has long been an open secret to certain epicures. The oozing Pont l'Évêque or Livarot, sold with a nudge and a wink at gourmet cheese shops; the reeking Epoisses, triple-wrapped and stashed in a Prada bag on the way through customs—these are emblems of devil-may-care sophistication nearly as clichéd as the flask of hooch in a Southern judge's chambers. What has changed, in recent years, is the fact that some of these cheeses are now homegrown. Clark Wolf used to make a point of going to a certain farmstead whenever he was visiting friends in upstate New York. "There was a guy there who was making contraband raw-milk Camembert," Wolf recalls. "It was incredibly good, but we always wondered if we'd be dead the next day." The story conjures up images of back-alley cheese exchanges, of men running through forests carrying wheels of Brie on their shoulders, hounds baying at their heels. But when I tracked down the cheesemaker in question he'd gone on to computer programming. He was in the kitchen one day stirring curd, he said, when he saw a car with a federal insignia pull up outside. O.K., he thought, this is it. When the knock on the door came, it turned out to be a land surveyor, but the cheesemaker had had enough. "You just can't live like that," he said. "You can't be an outlaw forever."

In 1983, a reporter at the *Times* published an exposé on contraband cheese: he had gone to eight food shops in Manhattan, and had found unaged raw-milk Camemberts and Bries in every one. After that, the F.D.A. quickly clamped down on cheese importers. Yet no arrests were made or fines levied, and within a few years the market quietly revived. This spring, at Murray's Cheese shop, in Greenwich Village, a raw-milk Camembert was perched on a mound of its pasteurized cousins, with a small sign stuck into it: "Get this before the F.D.A. does." Other cheesemongers claim that heat-treated cheeses are really made of raw milk, just to inflate the price. Online, Fromages.com will send raw-milk cheeses from France to anyone with a credit card. When my shipment arrived by FedEx, the deliverywoman handed over the refrigerated box with evident relief. "Here's your *fromage*," she said, wrinkling her nose.

The cheeses were delectable, but it was hard to tell how much they owed to raw milk and how much to mere mystique. So one afternoon, not long ago, I went to visit Max McCalman, the *maître fromager* at the restaurant Picholine, the hushed inner sanctum of lactophilia in Manhattan. McCalman is lean and phlegmatic, with heavy brows, rumpled skin, and cheekbones so narrow that his eyes seem almost to round the corner. When he talks about cheese, he falls into an intense monotone, as if he were reciting an argument endlessly rehearsed while cutting more than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds of cheese (at last count) into one-ounce portions. McCalman prefers the term "uncompromised milk" to raw milk, and bears toward his charges the doomed and anxious love of a kindly orphanage director. "Cheese has suffered enough," he says. "People just don't understand it. They don't know what it is."

We were sitting at the back of the restaurant, in a small room with mahogany wine racks on four sides. In the corner was McCalman's high-tech cheese cave: a large refrigerator kept at an unvarying forty-eight degrees Fahrenheit, with around eighty-five per cent humidity. On a butcher block in the center of the room, and on two carts alongside, the night's cheese selections were laid out: more than fifty noble slabs, towers, and pyramids, marbled and crumbling, like the ruins of an ancient metropolis. McCalman reached over and cut wedges from two Reblochon-style cheeses, one of pasteurized milk, the other of raw. We had done a few of these comparisons already, with the pasteurized invariably tasting milder, gummier, and less complex. But this time the difference was more elemental. The pasteurized version wasn't bad, with its musty orange rind and rich ivory pâte. But the raw-milk Reblochon seemed to bypass the taste buds and tap directly into the brain, its sweet, nutty, earthy notes rising and expanding from register to regis-



"Can we be seated under a vegan painting?"

ter, echoing in the upper palate as though in a sound chamber. I thought of something one of the founders of the Cheese of Choice Coalition had said when I asked her what difference raw milk could possibly make: "One is a cheese; the other is an aria by Maria Callas."

McCalman smiled sadly at the compromised Reblochon, as if at a three-legged dog. "I like all of our cheeses," he said. "Even the pasteurized." But when I asked him how old the raw-milk variety was, he frowned. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe it hasn't been aged sixty days, but we're not over here counting." To eat a cheese like this was to participate in the preservation of a dying culture, he said. "It's like the military policy: Don't ask, don't tell."

There are those, it is true, who lack the courage and the conviction to risk their lives for a dairy product. But then raw-milk advocates don't expect them to. Not really. McCalman says that Picholine serves about a ton of cheese every month, most of it unpasteurized, yet, in seven years as *maître fromager*, he hasn't heard "so much as one complaint of a tummy ache." It's one of the perverse ironies of F.D.A. policy, he says, that raw-milk cheese is actually better for us than pasteurized: easier to digest and better at fending off contaminants.

To Mother Noella, the best symbol of this paradox is the sawed-off whiskey barrel in which she makes her cheese. Built from a few oak boards bound by a crude iron hoop, the barrel violates any number of food-safety principles and F.D.A. regulations, but her local dairy inspector has learned to let it slide. It's more than a matter of tradition, Noella says; it's a triumph of rustic microbiology.

Standing in the abbey's dairy several weeks ago, Noella gazed down into the barrel's open mouth, at the glistening surface of what looked like an enormous flan. "Cheese is the collective memory of France," she told me, quoting a cheesemaker she once met. "No matter how extravagant or irrational its rituals seem, they usually have some practical purpose." Earlier that morning, before Mass, two sisters had filled the barrel with fresh milk—still warm from the cows and butter-yellow from the spring grasses they had eaten. A few millilitres of rennet had gone in, and its enzymes, distilled from the lining of a calf's fourth stomach, had done their work: the milk's proteins, once as long and loose as a skein of wool, were knitted into an elegant matrix, riddled with pockets of watery whey.

I reached down and fished out a hunk of curd. At this stage, it tasted as bland as poached egg white. But beneath the surface bacteria were furiously consuming lactose and converting it into lactic acid. As the pH plummeted, the acid would fend off *E. coli* and other pathogens that can't tolerate an acid environment. Most cheesemakers—even artisanal ones—add commercial cultures to their milk, just to help the process along. But Noella relies only on what's already in the barrel. Like everyone at the abbey, she starts out with next to nothing and builds a rich existence from it.

When Noella left home, in 1969, her name was Martha Marcellino. She was the youngest daughter in a family of gifted, headstrong Italians—her brother John (Jocko) Marcellino co-founded the fifties-revival group Sha Na Na—and after four years of Catholic high school she was hungry for "the most radical place" she could find. She opted for Sarah Lawrence, which at the time gave neither exams nor grades. But, after a year of watching her classmates skip lectures and feed LSD to their cats, she was ready for something a little more structured. She had no idea how radical her choice would be.

"You don't come ready-made to be a cloistered nun," she says. "When you step behind that grille, it's a shock to the body. It's, like, Oh my God, what have I done?" On her first trip to the abbey, on a weekend retreat in 1970, she was most impressed by the nuns' faith—the way they held to their vows, and to strict obedience, yet somehow seemed free. The abbey is a medieval place with a modern soul. The nuns are worldly and educated. (A number of them hold advanced degrees; one is a former movie star who gave Elvis his first onscreen kiss.) Yet their living areas are walled off from outsiders, and they sustain themselves on what they can grow and make on their three-hundred-and-sixty-acre farm. Seven Latin services punctuate the day, and in between the nuns work as beekeepers, cowherds, and blacksmiths; they make their own pottery, grow and blend their own herbal teas, raise their own hogs, and sell some of their products in a gift shop. As a postulant, Noella was given the task of milking the Holsteins. (The abbey now has Dutch Belted cows, which give richer milk and look a bit like they're wearing habits themselves—black with a pure-white band around the belly.) Then, in 1977, she was asked to make the abbey's cheese.

At first, the abbey's pigs feasted on her mistakes. "It takes time to get it right, so the pigs had a lot of cheese," she says. "I learned that flies could lay eggs and you would get maggots. Who knew? And I was using boards and bricks to press the cheese, so I'd get these big spongy, horrible things. So again: pigs." Noella used to tell the Abbess that she was praying for an old Frenchwoman to come and show her how it was done. When Lydie Zawislak came to visit the abbey, it seemed like an act of Providence. Zawislak was from the Auvergne, in the Massif Central, and her grandmother had taught her how to make Saint-Nectaire. "We just spent day and night making butter and cheese," Noella says. The barrel was Zawislak's idea, as was the wooden paddle for stirring curd, with a cross-shaped hole in the center. Within a year, Noella was re-creating Saint-Nectaire in nearly every particular, even the color and taste of its rind. The molds of the Massif Central apparently had close cousins in the hills of Connecticut.

Noella might have gone on making cheese, without a thought to its microbiology, but in 1985 an unaged cheese made with raw milk was blamed for twenty-nine fatalities—mostly stillbirths—in Southern California. The cheese was contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*, a bacterium that is often associated with food poisoning, which causes fever, aching muscles, and brief but violent stomach illness. When the F.D.A. subsequently cracked down on dairies across the country, one of the first victims was Noella's wooden cheese barrel: the local inspector insisted that she trade it in for a stainless-steel vat. The nuns could simply have stopped selling their cheese and gone on making it the old way. Instead, they complied with the inspector and set about learning to defend their traditions scientifically. Four nuns were asked to get doctorates in key disciplines: microbiology, animal science, plant science, and agronomy.

"It was just terrifying," Noella says. "I had been a nun for twelve years, I didn't

FIRST TASTES BY JULIAN BARNES

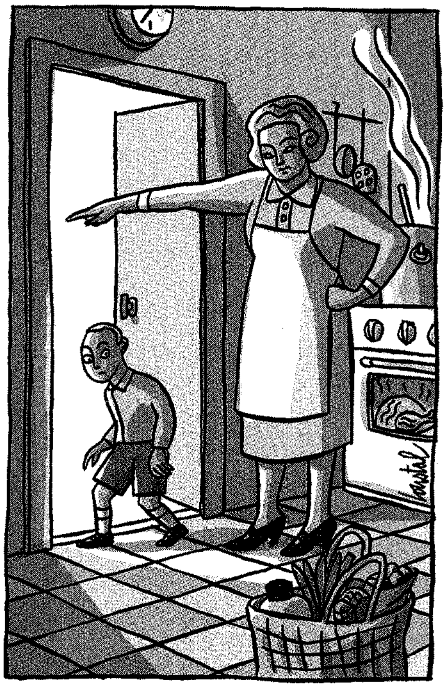
THE DOMESTIC MALE

I am a late-onset cook. In my childhood, the usual genteel protectionism surrounded activities in the voting booth, the marital bed, and the pew. But I failed to notice a fourth secret place—secret, at least, from boys—in the English middle-class home: the kitchen. Meals and my mother emerged from it, meals that often incorporated my father's garden produce, but neither he, my brother, nor I inquired about the transformational process. No one went so far as to say that cooking was sissy; it was just something that domestic males weren't suited to.

On school mornings, my father would prepare breakfast—reheated porridge, bacon, toast—while his small sons applied themselves to kitchen-stove duty (raking out the ashes, refilling the stove with coke). But male competence was limited to such matutinal dabbling, as was made plain one time when my mother was called away. My father prepared my packed lunch and, not understanding the theory of the sandwich, lovingly inserted things he knew I especially liked. A few hours later, on a train to an out-of-town sports field, I opened my lunch bag in front of fellow rugby players. My sandwiches were sodden, falling to bits, and bright red from large lumps of paternally cut beetroot; they blushed for me as I blushed for their contriver.

And, as with sex, politics, and religion, so with cooking: by the time I began to find out about it for myself, it was too late to ask my parents. I was in my mid-twenties and studying to become a lawyer; some of the food I concocted at that time was criminal. Top of my range was bacon chop, peas, and potatoes. The peas were frozen, of course; the potatoes were tinned and pre-peeled, and came in a sweetish brine that I used to drink; and the bacon chop was unlike anything I subsequently encountered under that name. Boneless, preshaped, and of a luminous pink, it was distinguished by its ability to keep its fluorescent hue no matter how long you cooked it. This gave much latitude to the chef: it wasn't undercooked unless positively cold, or overcooked unless coal-black and alight.

The key factors governing my cooking at this time were poverty, lack of skill, and gastronomic conservatism. One staple was breast of lamb: easy to roast and large enough to yield three successive dinners for about a shilling. Then I graduated to shoulder of lamb. With this, I would serve an enormous leek-potato-and-carrot pie, made from a recipe in the London *Evening Standard.* The pie's cheese sauce tasted strongly of flour, though this gradually diminished with daily reheating. Only later did I work out why.



My repertoire broadened. On home visits, it emerged that I cooked; my father looked at me with a mild liberal suspicion that he had previously deployed when I was spotted reading "The Communist Manifesto," or when I forced him to listen to Bartók string quartets. If this is as bad as it gets, his attitude seemed to imply, I can probably handle it. My mother was happier: daughterless, at least she had one child who retrospectively appreciated her decades in the galley. My brother, shielded by collegiate life and marriage, didn't cook anything beyond a fried egg until he was in his fifties.

The result of all this—and I doggedly blame the "all this," rather than myself—is that although I now cook with enthusiasm and pleasure, I do so with no sense of freedom or imagination. I need an exact shopping list and an avuncular cookbook. The ideal of carefree marketing—waltzing off with wicker basket over the arm, relaxedly buying what the day has best to offer, and then contriving it into something that might or might not have been made before—will always be beyond me. In the kitchen, I am an anxious pedant. The only liberty I take with a recipe is to increase the quantity of an ingredient (beetroot, for instance) that I particularly approve of. I am a reluctant taster—this is part trust, part fear. I am also prone to infantile bouts of chefish volatility, interpreting the mildest suggestion as gross interference or fiercely undeserved criticism.

Oh, yes, and I need praise. All late-onset cooks do. My first words when the door finally closes on the last dinner guest are likely to be of the formula "I overdid the beef." What I mean is "I didn't, did I? And if I did, it didn't matter, did it?" Usually, I get the contradiction I long for; sometimes also a reminder of the house rule that after the age of twenty-five you aren't allowed to blame your parents for anything. (Ah, so it *was* my fault I overdid the beef.) Happily, male cooks of my generation tend to receive far more praise than we deserve, objectively speaking. Subjectively, however, we can never get enough. ♦

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

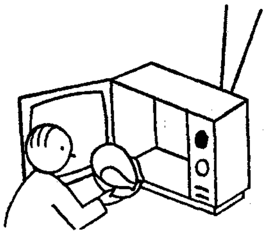
even have a bachelor's degree, and my first course was algebra and trigonometry, things I'd avoided in high school." To make matters worse, not long after the inspector's visit something went horribly wrong at the abbey's dairy. Instead of shrinking as they aged, the cheeses were swelling to the size of footballs and sometimes exploding. Noella took samples of milk and curd and tested them at the university. Then she swabbed every inch of the dairy kitchen, the equipment, the cows' udders and the milkers' hands, and ran tests again. The milk was clean enough to drink—its bad bacteria were too scarce to do any harm. But, soon after it went into the vat, it became infested with *E. coli*. Noella next made two batches of cheese—one in a stainless-steel vat, the other in a wooden barrel—and inoculated them with *E. coli*. The results were as clear as they were counter-intuitive. In the cheese from the sterile vat, *E. coli* populations thrived even after the cheese had ripened; in the cheese from the wooden barrel, they gradually died off.

"What was happening was that good bacteria were growing in the wood," Noella explained, when she told me this story at the dairy. "It was like a sourdough culture that you keep on using, and it was driving off the *E. coli*." She reached into the barrel and dredged up a ragged white slab of curd, then plopped it into a round beechwood mold. The curd had been cut and stirred, releasing its pockets of whey and settling to the bottom. Now it had to be pressed by hand in order to fill the mold to capacity, then placed in a mechanical press. Noella bent over and pushed the heels of her hands into the curd, leaning into the motion until pale streams of whey trickled from the mold. Years of this kind of work, of squeezing udders every morning and carrying buckets of milk up and down stairs, had given her carpal tunnel syndrome in both wrists, and she had already had surgery a number of times. "The instinct is to move around," she said, keeping her hands steady despite the pain. "But it's better not to. '*Restez là*,' Lydie always said." Stay where you are.

This past spring, Mother Noella, Mother Telchilde, and a committee of other cheese experts began to map out a scientific strategy for defending raw-milk cheese. The whiskey-barrel story may have convinced Noella's inspector, but she knew that it wouldn't pass muster with the F.D.A. The agency leans toward zero tolerance in matters of food safety, and it makes no exceptions for cloisters. Government scientists have finished the first half of their cheese study, and the news isn't good. They've made raw-milk Cheddar under typical dairy conditions and inoculated it with strains of *E. coli* which have been associated with outbreaks. The doses were roughly a hundred to ten thousand times higher than would ordinarily be found in a natural cheese, so it is not surprising that the bacteria survived the aging process. But the F.D.A. spokesman I talked to seemed to draw broader conclusions. "Sixty days does not render the product pathogen-free," he said.

The next phase of the study will show whether lower doses of bacteria fare as well. But in a sense the F.D.A. already has an answer. Government statistics show that cheese is among the safest foods on the market—far less likely to make you sick than chicken, beef, pork, eggs, fish, or even vegetables. It's true that most of the cheeses covered by that statistic were pasteurized. Yet between 1948 and 1988 aged raw-milk cheese caused only one outbreak of disease in the United States, while pasteurized cheese caused five outbreaks. Catherine Donnelly, a professor of food microbiology at the University of Vermont and an expert on *Listeria*, spent a year reviewing the epidemiological literature at the behest of the Cheese of Choice Coalition. "Aged raw-milk cheeses have enjoyed a remarkable safety record," she concluded this spring. When an outbreak does occur, it's usually caused by a cheese that became contaminated *after* it was pasteurized.

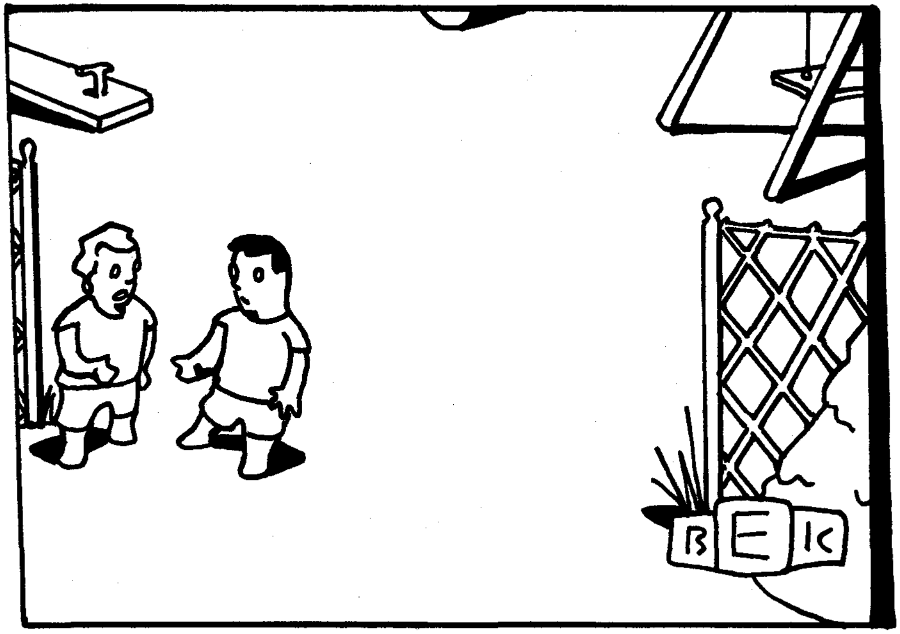
Pasteurization has its place, of course. For a raw-milk cheese to be safe, it has to go straight from cow to curd to consumer, with impeccable hygiene every step of the way. That's fine for a French farmer with a village market down the road, or for an American with a few Jerseys and a lot of FedEx boxes. But it's not so good for Kraft. Cheesemaking will always be an industrial business in America—the geography as much as the culture dictates it. There's no margin for holding raw milk in a tanker while it crosses South Dakota, no guarantee that one sloppy farmer won't taint a thousand cheeses when his milk is mixed in at the factory.



The real question, then, is how and where to make exceptions. Should an American cheesemaker be able to make a Mont d'Or if her standards are high enough? Most scientists agree that after sixty days almost any cheese is safe. But before that the risks begin to rise. "People always say, 'Where are the bodies?'" Rusty Bishop, the director of the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research, says. "The bodies are in France." In the past seven years, ten people have died after being infected by *Listeria* in unaged French cheeses, and many thousands more have suffered stomach illnesses. Unlike an aged Cheddar, a Mont d'Or is high in moisture and low in acidity—an ideal breeding ground for bacteria, good and bad. "I mean, there is nothing about those cheeses that would inhibit pathogens," Donnelly says.

Still, a curious thing happens when you talk to cheese experts. They start by gravely intoning morbidity statistics and bacteria counts. But as soon as you ask whether they themselves would eat an unaged cheese their worries seem to evaporate. "Absolutely!" Richard Koby, a lawyer for the Cheese Importers Association of America, told me. "And I've gotten sick before." Bishop says that he regularly eats unaged cheese in France, but he jokes that he always disinfects it with plenty of wine. And Donnelly, who keeps a boat called Sailmonella on Lake Champlain, could bring herself to pass up raw-milk cheese only when she was pregnant. "You know what?" she says. "It's really good."

It comes down to defining reasonable risk—something Americans have never been very good at. On the same day that Max McCalman worried about the demise of raw-milk cheese, restaurants around the city were serving oysters on the half shell. Raw shellfish causes fifty times as many illnesses as cheese, yet diners have learned to live with that risk. They weigh guaranteed pleasure against potential pain, and if it's fall or winter, when oysters are least likely to be contaminated, they casually order a dozen. If the F.D.A. were to allow it, we might develop the same offhand calculus for cheese. We'd come to trust certain farmsteads, whether their cheeses are aged or not, and when in doubt choose pasteurized cheese. The alternative would be to stick to Cheez Whiz, and its worrisome list of chemical additives, or avoid cheese entirely. If you can't stand a little risk, as one microbiologist put it, shoot the cow.



"We've done a lot of important playing here today."

• •

Inside the abbey's cheese cave—a corner of a basement in the house beside the dairy—the walls are lined with wooden racks filled with ripening wheels. The air smells of wet earth, but it's really something more peculiar: geosmin, a chemical compound produced by *G. candidum*. Noella showed me where the mold grew on some of the older cheeses, wrinkling the surface as if it were a fine linen shirt. Then she took down a younger wheel, still plump and yellow but topped with a wispy crop of white hairs. She put the wheel under a microscope and twiddled the knobs for a moment, then moved aside to let me see. A field of ghostly dandelions hovered into view, each crowned with a perfect sphere of black spores. "They're beautiful," I told her, and she laughed. "That's the spirit. But if you were making Reblochon you'd kill yourself."

This was the hair-of-the-cat mold, the cheesemaker's bane. The spores in a single stalk could infest a cave within a matter of hours, leaping from wheel to wheel on the lightest currents of air. Wherever they landed, they would take root in the curd, digesting proteins and secreting bitter peptides. "They call it *la bête noire*," Noella said. She had once known a woman in the French Alps whose Reblochon was so badly infested that she called in an expert from the local dairy school. This was in the Haute-Savoie, where cheesemakers trace a cross in their curd before cutting it, and science is never far removed from religion. "I can't help you," the expert said. "You've been visited by *un mauvais sort*"—a bad spell. The only remedy was to call in a priest and have him exorcise the cave.

And yet in the right place, on the right wheel of cheese, the same mold could change from a curse to a blessing. In Noella's cheese, the bitter peptides would be digested by *G. candidum*, and the two molds would join forces in breaking down fats and proteins, transforming the chewy curd into a tender pâte. Like a continent evolving in rapid motion, the ripening rind would be invaded by wave after wave of new species, turning from gold to gray to a mottled brown. The cat hairs would sprout up like ancient ferns, then topple and turn to a velvet compost for their successors. The penicillium molds would arrive, their stalks too fine to be seen under a standard microscope, and put down pillowy patches of the palest gray. Then, at last, a faint-pink blush would spread across the surface like a sunset: *Trichothecium roseum*, the flower of the molds.

"St. Benedict had a vision, just before he died, in which he saw the whole world in a ray of light," Noella said. "For me, that's what it's like to see through a microscope. You look at the rind of a cheese and there's a whole world there." Every dairy, every cheese cave, has its own specific ecology. Every handful of soil, no matter how ordinary, contains more biodiversity than a rain forest. That was the great lesson of her doctoral research. In just seven French dairies, she found eighteen unique strains of *G. candidum*. (The abbey's strain is more vigorous than all but one of them. "I'm so proud of my fungus," Noella said.) Most dairies never tap into this native genius. They dose their milk with prepackaged bacteria and spray their cheeses with generic molds, never guessing that their local soil may hold the secret to the next Roquefort or Gruyère—to an American cheese as inimitable as a Baldwin apple or a Concord grape.

Noella pulled a perfectly ripe wheel from the shelf and put it under the microscope. Cheesemaking is a kind of Eucharist, she likes to think, transforming the simplest material into a transcendent food—"milk's leap toward immortality," as the essayist Clifton Fadiman put it. But ripening is really more like prayer. You repeat an ancient formula as faithfully as possible, then you wait for something extraordinary to happen—for a visitation that is never guaranteed.

It's tempting to imagine what wonders Noella might conjure, given the same freedom as the French. But that's too much to hope for, even for a nun. "I can't sit around here dreaming about new cheeses," she said. Beneath the microscope's lens, the last wave of settlers was arriving: four pearlescent spheres, perched on twitchy, hairlike legs, traversing the fields of mold like Conestoga wagons. "Cheese mites," Noella said. She took a straw brush and swept the surface clean, then handed the wheel to me. "Don't worry," she said. "They say they always pick the best cheese." ♦

FICTION

SUMMER OF THE HOT TUBS

BY ANNIE PROULX

WILLIAM EGGLESTON/CHEIM & READ

Elk Tooth, Wyoming, has little going for it beyond the junk yard, despite a population of nearly eighty people. If you want a fancy dinner or batteries or tampons you drive forty-four miles down Dog Ear Creek until you hit Sack and there are two stores and a garage. But Elk Tooth has its attractions—the three bars, Silvertip, the Pee Wee, and Muddy's Hole.

The old tradition of pioneer wayside eating houses—road ranches—hangs on as well. There is one of these north of town which serves supper for three dollars, although there is no menu choice and Mrs. Polidora uses paper plates—unsatisfactory if you like to hear your fork clink. Paper plates or not, Mrs. Polidora will put a platter of elk steaks on the table flanked by a big green bowl of mashed potatoes, a pitcher of milk gravy, and a saucer of chokecherry jelly. Somehow she can make that elk last a year.

In Elk Tooth everyone tries to be a character and with some success. There is little more to it than being broke, proud, ingenious, and setting your heels against civilized society's pull.

Mrs. Polidora's steady customer is Willy Huson, who fixes trucks and lawnmowers in a minimal way. He was born and raised in Elk Tooth but for years lived in distant cities in distant states, working as a mechanic for United Airlines. When questioned why he left a lucrative job to return to Elk Tooth he says, "I couldn't take it no more." What "it" is no one asks, for everyone in Wyoming knows of the red hell that lies beyond the state's borders. He lives with a tan dog he calls Igor.

Willy Huson has neither workshop nor garage but tinkers in the narrow dirt run in front of his trailer. If the job is a big truck he parks it in the road and lies under it after putting up a folding sign at the curve. The sign says "Sand Her Down," which is Willy's way of saying "Go slow, mechanic in road." Igor, seeing Willy lying in the road, follows his example and has been hit twice.

Sometimes, in a burst of energy, Willy continues to work on a vehicle after the problem is repaired, putting in salvaged hoses, running wires to buttons and switches. Deb Sipple, a character himself, once drove away in his 1983

Toyota pickup with a freshly flushed radiator and eleven toggle switches on the dashboard that activated nothing. Mrs. Straw Bird got her Explorer back with an enormous fixed spotlight on top that her husband said would do very well for spotting owls at night or enemy aircraft if it hadn't been that the horn blew every time they switched on the beam. Customers pay what they feel the work is worth. Little that Willy Huson fixes runs longer than five days or fifty miles, whichever comes first, but the general feeling is that sometimes that is all you need—it will hold together long enough to get to Sack and the real garage.

At one time Willy Huson had started to build a garage onto the side of his trailer and framed out a lean-to with poles stolen from Forest Service buck fences—a pole here, another there. He nailed on four boards selected randomly from his pile of warped lumber, then quit. It is a point of pride in Elk Tooth to quit whenever and whatever needs quitting. If Willy Huson stops working on a lawnmower or skimobile or truck at a crucial time it is the owner's tough luck. Nothing can bring him back to something he's quit.

He takes his time setting to work, and some vehicles sit in front of the trailer for months before he lifts their hoods. Bartender Amanda Gribb, who has once or twice eighty-sixed Willy from the Pee Wee, waited seventeen weeks for her 1956 Power Wagon and worked up a grudge while she waited. She had taken it to him in the autumn. It was a spring day when she found a grimy postcard in her mailbox. It said "fixed. come get it." She got a lift out to the trailer with Sven Polidora, a little drunk but on his way home, seven miles west of Huson's trailer.

The Power Wagon stood forlorn with one wheel in the ditch. Amanda called Willy's name, but there was no answer. She shrugged and got into the Power Wagon. There was a note on the seat: "leave money in mailbox." She turned on the ignition first—no point in leaving money if the truck still didn't run—and two tremendous explosions shook the vehicle. Fire spurted out the back end of the Power Wagon. The engine died. She looked in the rearview mirror and saw dozens of small burning objects scattered on Willy Huson's grass, setting it on fire. She got out. Once she got beyond the idea of a terrorist attack, the nuggets of fire looked familiar; one or two that had escaped ignition were plainly dog kibble. She scooped up the smoldering lumps with a tin can lying in the yard. She guessed that during the winter some enterprising mouse had stolen dog food from Igor's dish and packed it away in the tailpipe of the Power Wagon. She put the smoking can in Willy's mailbox along with a nickel, re-started the Power Wagon, and drove back to town trailing a stream of sparks and some coarse language.

Last summer a kind of madness swept through Elk Tooth, a passion for outdoor hot tubs. No one, of course, bought one. All of them were fashioned from scrap metal, old stock tanks and odds and ends found at Donald's Rawhide Cowboy Junkyard. The more fastidious built plank boardwalks around the tub perimeters to keep dirt and cactus spines out of the water. In a fuel pinch, sections of the walk could be tossed into the firebox. All the hot tubs were heated by wood-fired stoves.

Willy Huson, who sets his heels not only against the outside world but against Elk Tooth's social leaders, was a holdout, full of scorn for outdoor bathing.

"If I want a soak my ass I'll drive up to Thermop."

Thermopolis and its famed hot springs was two hundred and forty miles distant from Elk Tooth and clogged with tourists. A willingness to go there, said Deb Sipple, showed how Willy's mind had been damaged by out-of-state residence.

"Thing is," said Sipple, "I seen his expression when he was lookin' at my hot tub. He'd give his left nut a have one just like it."

Near the end of the summer Willy Huson visited his grandmother on the old family ranch near Lingle, where the Husons had run cows since 1872. Foraging through an equipment shed, he came across an object that screamed "hot tub." Better than "hot tub," it screamed "weird and unique hot tub unlike (and better than) any other." With the help of his uncle Doug and two of Doug's boys, Pliers and Rammy, they got it into Willy's truck. He started back to Elk Tooth singing "Wrong-Eyed Jesus" along with Jim White.

His uncle chased after him for six miles, pulled abreast, and shouted into the rushing wind, "Don't you want the tripod?"

"Hell, yes, I only got the one engine hoist and I need it a hoist engines."

Back in Elk Tooth, he made some effort to put his prize in a secluded spot, but, given the nature of his property, a narrow strip of ground between a sheer cliff and the road, crowded with the house trailer, the lumber piles, seven or eight defunct trucks (for parts), the four-board garage, the doghouse, a dozen dead lawnmowers, a pile of stone, another of gravel, and a single young cottonwood tree, there was no secluded spot.

"Fuck 'em," said Willy Huson.

He off-loaded the enormous inch-thick cast-iron pot, three feet across and last used in 1912 by some unknown biscuit-hurler in the long-ago Huson fall roundup. Willy jimmied it into place near the cottonwood, about five feet from the road. It swayed ponderously from the massive tripod chain.

After a search Willy found two cut lengths of hose and taped them together. The tape held long enough to fill the kettle halfway, which, he thought, figuring displacement, would be about right. A flotsam of mouse droppings, straw chaff, and rust particles floated to the surface. Adhering to the bottom was a crust of ninety-year-old dried son-of-a-bitch stew. He split a few sticks of kindling, started a fire beneath the pot with a curl of tarpaper, added chunk wood. Smoke rose. While he waited for the water to heat, he practiced shooting at the wasps' nest in the cottonwood with his .22 pistol.

At last steam rose from the kettle. There was a heavy and peculiar smell. He raked the coals and smoking wood out from under the pot and stripped down, draping his clothes over the projecting ends of the boards in the nearby lumber pile. The remnant of the son-of-a-bitch stew, the size of a cow pie, had loosened from the bottom and floated on top of the water. He scooped it out with his hand and sent it flying into the road. The water in the tub was plenty hot. He put in one foot, then the other. The water rose above his knees. The water was very hot but not as hot as the iron bottom of the pot, which roasted the soles of his feet. He got out, danced in the cool dirt, pulled on his

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boots. Now the boots were full of grit.

He felt the rim of the pot. It was warm but not searing. He decided on a different entry trajectory and lowered himself until his more tender parts hung over the water and there he paused, suspended, as Mr. and Mrs. Ulysses Bird (brother and sister-in-law of Straw Bird) drove slowly by. Mrs. Bird started to wave, looked again, thought better of it.

Ulysses Bird walked into the Pee Wee Bar and said, "God damn, we just seen somethin'. Willy Huson got hisself a cannibal-pot hot tub. He looked like a missionary was goin' a get boiled." He described the tub, the closeness of it to the road, the agonized expression on Willy's face as he sat hastily in the water, Mrs. Bird's expression and exclamations as she thought of how she had almost waved.

Amanda Gribb, who was tending bar, listened closely. "Hey," she said in her loud bartender voice. "Get on back there with this." She opened the refrigerator and took out a package of frozen corn and a half-empty jar of maraschino cherries, then foraged in the cupboard for a can of chili powder. "Drop these in his damn cannibal hot tub. If he's goin' a cook hisself let's get some flavor in there. Hell, I'll come with you, shake that chili where it will do some good."

They went as quickly as they could. But Willy Huson was gone, clothes, gravelly boots, truck, and all. The pot steamed. The water was still hot, and in it floated a wasps' nest. A few puzzled wasps flew around the cottonwood tree. There were wet footprints in the dust. There was no sense in wasting the chili, corn, and cherries if Willy wasn't in his soup pot. There would probably be another time.

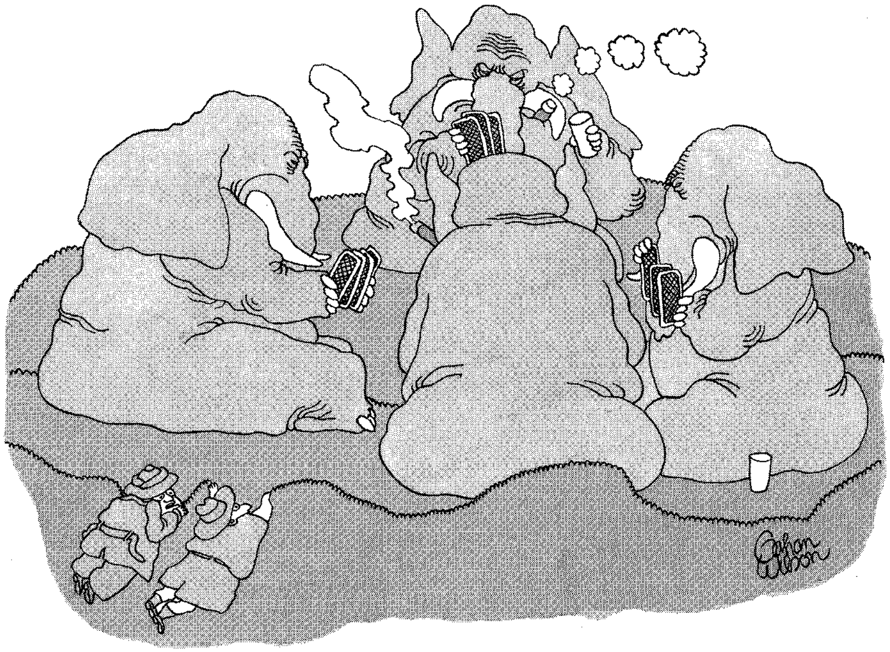
As they turned to leave, Ulysses Bird stepped on the son-of-a-bitch stew, which, under the influence of the hot water, had metamorphosed into a black jellyfish. It clung to his boot like tar. He scraped it off with a stick, got the stick pronged into it, and held it up. It swung, glistening.

"Seems like it's fresh, whatever it is," he said. "It got the right shape, but I doubt it ever come out a the south end of a cow. Looks more like a platypus's afterbirth."

Amanda Gribb suddenly took the stick from his hand and flipped the blob into the hot tub. "There, let him find that in his cannibal pot."

Over the weeks, the drought dried up the water in the cannibal hot tub and once again the son-of-a-bitch stew lies dormant at the bottom.

It was only last month that Willy Huson reappeared, driving a 1949 Land Rover and with a non-English-speaking Tibetan girlfriend at his side, two items that earned him towering status points in the Elk Tooth eccentricity race. He didn't even glance at the cannibal pot; he had quit that. ♦



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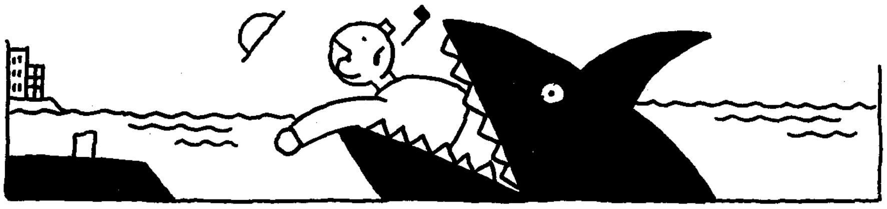


GERALD SCARFE

BOOKS

FOOD PROCESSOR

A brief history of eating.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Is it just me, or are all food histories fun to read? It's nice to find out that world-shaking events were caused not only by economics and religion but by somebody's dinner. And then, no matter how scholarly food historians aim to be, they always end up telling good stories: what Montezuma ate on a regular night (chicken, turkey, songbirds, doves, ducks, rabbits, pheasants, partridges, quail, and, according to a secondhand report, an adolescent boy or two, followed by tortillas and hot chocolate), not to speak of the dishes that Christopher Columbus, thinking he had arrived in India, found being served in what was in fact the Caribbean (spiders, worms, and a bread made of rotted zamia stems). Food historians have seen it all. Nothing impresses them; nothing frightens them.

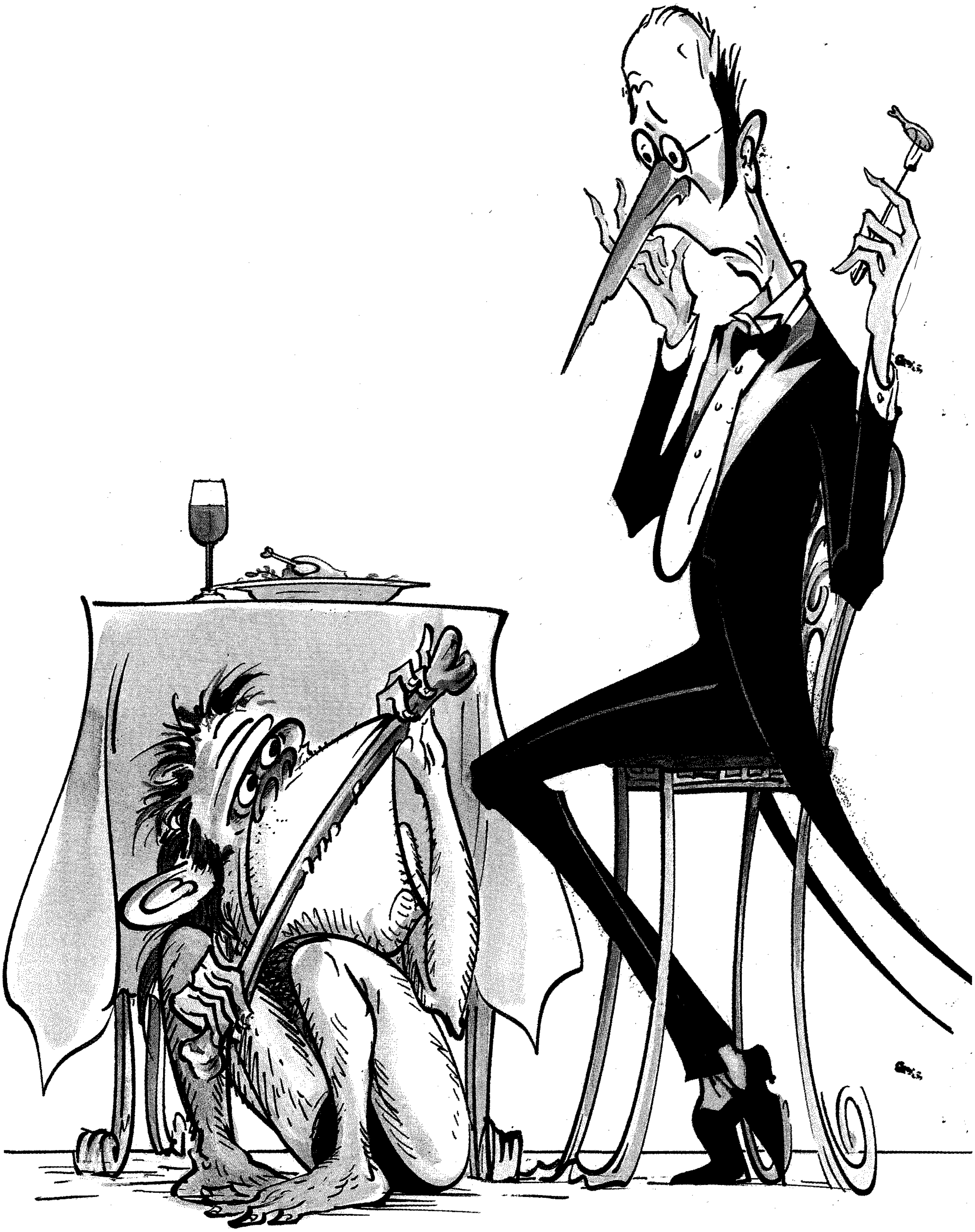
Now this happy band has a new member, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, an English-educated Spaniard who teaches modern history at Oxford and has produced thirteen books, including "Religion" (1997), "Truth: A History" (1997), and "Civilizations" (2001). His new volume, "Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food" (Free Press; $25), is no less comprehensive. In the preface, Fernández-Armesto tells us his aims:

> To take a genuinely global perspective; to treat food history as a theme of world history . . . ; to treat evenhandedly the ecological, cultural and culinary concepts of the subject; to combine a broad conspectus with selectively detailed excursions into particular cases; to trace connections, at every stage, between the food of the past and the way we eat today; and to do all this briefly.

In fact, he does it in two hundred and twenty-four pages. The book belongs to that excellent British genre the "brief history," in which a professor who nevertheless can write—the species survives in England—gives us a short, lively rundown on the subject without saying anything really new. At one point, Fernández-Armesto mentions that he is unusually well versed in the history of the banana. Why? Well, when he was a research fellow at St. John's College, Oxford, Sunday dinners posed a delicate problem. On those nights, the fellows invited ladies, and they also entertained the curate who had presided over evensong. In such mixed company, what could one possibly talk about? "Since bananas always formed part of the dessert. . . the subject of the history and mythology of the banana could be relied on to recur frequently. Was it the fruit of paradise, as Islamic tradition has it? Where and when was it first cultivated? How diffused?. . . I have known rather a lot about bananas ever since." Much of the book sounds this way: learned but relaxed. Fernández-Armesto doesn't mind telling us that most of his material consists of note cards laid aside during his work on "Civilizations," or that he turned them into a book "mainly as a *devoir de vacances* in the course of the calendar year 2000." British, again—they write fast.

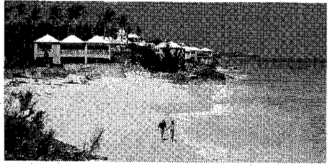
The story is divided into eight chapters, one for each of eight "revolutions" in our ancestors' approach to food: the invention of cooking, the attachment of symbolic meaning to food, the development of herding, the birth of agriculture, the use of food as a marker of social class, the trade of food between cultures, the transfer of foodstuffs between continents, and, finally, industrialization. But Fernández-Armesto is not strict about his categories; those note cards were going to get in this time. Thus, he opens Chapter 1, on the invention of cooking, with a discursion on the pleasures of the uncooked. In the Sudan, he reports, "Nuer lovers show mutual affection by feeding each other lice freshly plucked from their heads." (Food historians love to gross us out.) And what do we mean by "cooked," anyway? Is fire necessary? Some equestrian nomads, though they eat their meat raw, tenderize it first by placing it under their saddles before a long ride; it is thus pounded and warmed—seasoned, too, by the horse's sweat. Such meat is cooked, in a way. But, no, Fernández-Armesto decides, fire is necessary, because it brings the community together. As hunter-gatherers, people ate alone. They went out onto the savanna, found a nut, stuck it in their mouth, and that was that. Once they began cooking, however, they gathered around the fire, and in the process they began thinking as we do. The word "focus," he reminds us, is Latin for "hearth."

After cooking, the next step was to see spirits in the pot. Fernández-Armesto kicks off his chapter on food and symbolism with an enthusiastic discussion of cannibalism. The tone is set by an epigraph recording what the seventeenth-century Caribbeans thought of their various visitors from Europe. The French were delicious, the islanders said, the English rather less so, and the Spaniards quite stringy, even when boiled. Fernández-Armesto cites oddball modern cases: Jeffrey Dahmer gets a mention, as does Isse Sagawa, the "cannibal of the Bois de Boulogne," who, in 1981, tired of his girlfriend and ate her. The book also describes instances of "survivor cannibalism," including that of the Uruguayan rugby players whose plane crashed in the Andes, in 1972, and who, with their fellow-passengers, ate fifteen of the dead before the rescue squad arrived. But Fernández-Armesto agrees with other historians that most cannibalism has been motivated not by



Fernández-Armesto's book cleaves to the historical principle that what people eat is intimately related to what they do the rest of the time.

a shade apart.



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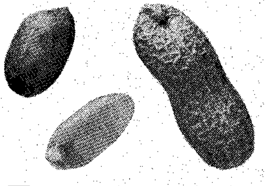

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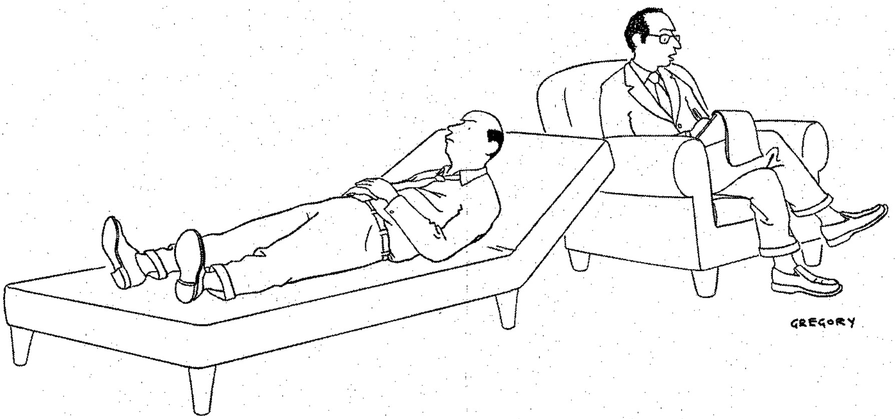
physical hunger but by spiritual need. The Papuan Orokaiva, like many other cannibals on record, eat their enemies in order to capture their souls; the Gimi women of the Papuan highlands, until quite recently, ate their deceased menfolk in order to give them a congenial resting place. (" 'We could not have left a man to rot!' protest the women.") Fernández-Armesto regards these practices as merely an extreme example of the attachment of symbolic meaning to food, and he compares them to contemporary "health" diets aimed at enhancing one's beauty or tranquillity or moral worth. "Strangely," he writes, "cannibals turn out to have a lot in common with vegans."

If that sounds fanciful, so do some of Fernández-Armesto's other assertions. He argues that snails may have been the first "herded" animals. He thinks that, if we had wanted to, we could have domesticated kangaroos, too. ("A friend of mine had a pet kangaroo when he was a boy. After release into the wild, the kangaroo often returned to visit him, climbed the steps and knocked on his bedroom door.") The book is a little breezy. Nevertheless, it cleaves to a firm historical principle; namely, that what people eat is intimately related to what they do the rest of the time. Actually, the subject of "Near a Thousand Tables" is not so much the history of food as the history of humankind viewed from the kitchen door. Take one example: the demand for Eastern spices—pepper above all—on the part of Western élites in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The effort to find a westward route to the Indies, one that would cut out the Eastern middlemen and their surcharges, involved unprecedentedly long voyages, and, hence, nutritional problems. Scurvy, caused by a deficiency of Vitamin C, sometimes killed off more than half a ship's crew. Vitamins weren't discovered for a few more centuries, but the riddle of the sailors' illnesses, and the allied challenge of long-term food storage, gave a great boost to European science. Francis Bacon was a martyr to this research. He died of an infection he picked up from a chicken he was using in a food-preservation experiment.

At the same time, the Old World's discovery of the New led to wars of colonization, fought by soldiers who needed to be provisioned from afar. Margarine, much less perishable than butter, was developed for the French Navy in 1869. (Its inventor called it margarine because its then white sheen reminded him of the pearls known as marguerites.) Somewhat earlier, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the English invented canning, also for military use, whereupon the emptied cans entered into colonial cultures. Lord Redesdale, the diplomat and writer (and the grandfather of the Mitford girls), found Huntley and Palmer biscuit tins being "used as a portable garden by a Mongolian chieftainness in the eighteen-sixties and as altar vessels in a chapel in Ceylon in the eighteen-nineties. They were recycled as sword scabbards by followers of the Mahdi, and during the Christianization of Uganda served as containers to preserve Bibles from white ants."

But the crucial consequence of the voyages of exploration was the migration of foods from one continent to another, the subject of Fernández-Armesto's most compelling chapter. Before the "Columbian exchange"—so called because Columbus was its prime mover—there were no tomatoes in Italy, no pineapples in Hawaii, no rice in the Carolinas, no potatoes in Ireland, no cattle in Argentina. The Columbian exchange created what we now regard as the world's regional cuisines. The main point, however, is that these transplantings greatly increased the planet's food production. Before the age of exploration, the potato grew only in Peru. By the eighteenth century, it was supporting much of Northern Europe, and quite well. Packed with carbohydrates, protein, and numerous vitamins and minerals, it is one of the world's most nutritionally complete foods. (This became a problem. Because potatoes were so nourishing, many Europeans abandoned other crops, thus risking starvation if the potato crop failed. In the Irish potato famine of the eighteen-forties, a million people died, and more than a million emigrated.) Increased food production led to a population explosion, which in turn created more wars, more colonization. It is a vast feedback cycle.

Politics, of course, is another element



"In the mental-health profession, we try to avoid negative labels, like 'a hundred and fifty bucks an hour—that's crazy!' or 'three fifty-minute sessions a week—that's insane!'"

• •

in the cycle. With the events set off by Europe's discovery of the Americas, world power tilted to the West. Fernández-Armesto sheds no tears over that development. If I'm not mistaken, his politics are Tory; in any case, his stance is observational, even Olympian. "There was never a golden age of equality in the history of humankind," he writes. Hominid remains show nutritional disparities between people of the same communities, and in Paleolithic burial sites those disparities correlate with signs of mortuary honor. For a very long time, it seems, some people have been getting more to eat than others, and getting more power as both cause and result.

With regard to the biggest eaters, and the biggest power, in history—the United States—Fernández-Armesto again registers no complaint. He scoffs at the old notion of the gentle, worshipful American Indians, who used every single part of the buffalo. "In much of North America," he writes, "their methods were outrageously wasteful." As for the Europeans who displaced them, he is more interested in the boldness of their project than in any question of its justice. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the Great Plains—a tract of land as large as India—were covered by a carpet of tough, inedible grass, a sort of tall AstroTurf. Once the Europeans arrived, with their native grains, and put in a few generations' worth of backbreaking labor, the plains became the "breadbasket of the world." To Fernández-Armesto, this is impressive:

> When one considers the vastness and intractability of the prairie, its hostile soil and its ornery climate; . . . when one considers for how long this near-desert was incapable of sustaining more than its own sparse, indigenous population; when all this is taken into account, the achievement that has made the American Midwest what it is today seems hardly credible.

If Fernández-Armesto eschews questions of political justice, what he offers instead is that popular English export common sense. In school, many of us were told that the rise of agriculture was an inevitability. Not according to Fernández-Armesto. Hunting was hard, he says, but agriculture was harder. It deprived people of their freedom. It increased social inequality. (Someone had to control the irrigation ditches.) In its early stages, it yielded a poorer diet than hunting and gathering. Indeed, as with the potato, it exposed people to famine, because they began relying on fewer foodstuffs. In the areas of the world where agriculture is thought to have begun, wild grain was abundant. There is evidence that prehistoric hunter-gatherers knew about cultivation, and even practiced it a little, but probably not much, because it was such a nuisance. You had to keep checking the plants, fussing over them, worrying about rain. So why did people decide to do this full-time? Fernández-Armesto says nobody knows. There are thirty-eight major theories, he reports. My favorite is the beer theory, which holds that the pleasures of drinking beer to-

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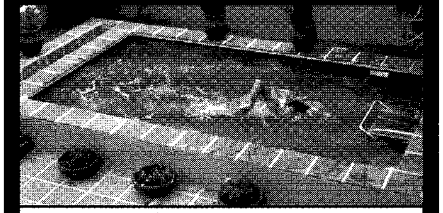
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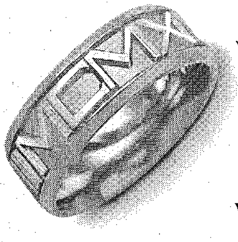
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gether persuaded people to settle down in sociable little villages, so that they could drink more beer together. Forty per cent of the ancient Sumerian wheat harvest went to the distillery.

As the beer theory suggests, Fernández-Armesto is antimaterialist. "Man is not an economic animal," the book asserts. He is an imaginative animal, an animal with notions. In this view, "Near a Thousand Tables" blazes no trail; most food writing these days seems to be about food as symbol. But Fernández-Armesto adds some excellent material, especially on the modern connections between food and faith. For example, a number of Quaker families, notably the English Cadburys, went into the production of cocoa because they saw hot chocolate as a temperance drink. Christianity, however, was only one of the major Western religions of the nineteenth century. There was also manifest destiny, and the need to toughen us up in order to achieve it. Sylvester Graham, a revivalist preacher and the father of the eponymous cracker, recommended wheat and celibacy. J. H. Kellogg, raised as an Adventist, also stumped for grains. To him, of course, we owe cornflakes. Arrayed against these low-protein crusaders were the high-protein folk, notably James H. Salisbury, whose nutritional experiments on himself, including long periods of eating only one food or another, left him with a distaste for vegetables. In his 1888 book, "The Relation of Alimentation and Disease," he declared that vegetables paralyzed the muscles of the stomach, making it "flabby and baggy." What human beings needed was beef and more beef, preferably pulped. Salisbury steak, an almost daily occurrence in the college cafeterias of yesteryear, was named after this theorist, but, according to Fernández-Armesto, what Salisbury actually invented was the hamburger. Meanwhile, sauces and condiments were the province of Henry J. Heinz, of Pittsburgh, who, intending to go into the Lutheran ministry, went into the food ministry instead. He developed more varieties than the fifty-seven bannered in his company's motto, but he stuck to that number because it had been vouchsafed to him in a vision he had while riding the New York City subway.

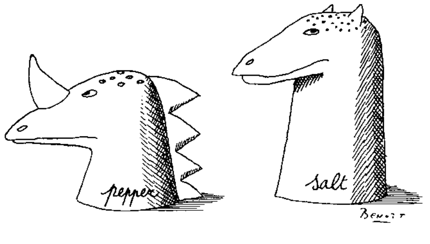
Food evangelism has not gone away. Nor, according to Fernández-Armesto, have most of our forbears' other food habits. Takeout, for example, is at least two thousand years old. The majority of ancient Romans got their dinners from street venders, as did European city dwellers of later centuries, and there was much to choose from. Zabar's has nothing on the street kitchens of thirteenth-century Paris, where "you could buy boiled and roast veal, beef, mutton, pork, lamb, kid, pigeon, capon, goose; spiced pasties filled with chopped pork, chicken or eel; tarts filled with soft cheese or egg, hot waffles and wafers, cakes, pancakes, simnels. . . hot mashed peas, garlic sauce, cheese of Champagne and Brie." Trends that have vanished will probably be back pretty soon. Once white bread was developed, brown bread was strictly for poor people and immigrants. Then came the gastronomic revolution of the sixties, and now white bread is for poor people and immigrants. Hence the unflappability of the food historians. Actually, one or two things do raise Fernández-Armesto's hackles, such as salad bars, where "sad shreds of salad vegetables lie exposed to contamination." Indeed, he regards the whole modern craze for raw foods as a species of "romantic primitivism." Nor is he a friend of the microwave oven. By making it easier for family members to eat different meals at different times, microwaves threaten to undo the cooking revolution, he says, and to return us "to a presocial phase of evolution."

Still, he thinks we'll get over these dangerous ideas: "Reason and instinct are combining irresistibly to reverse them." People have rejected instant coffee, he assures us, and "the priorities of fast food already seem as outmoded as Futurism or Vorticism." We should all just relax, and go home and have dinner with our families: "The future will be much more like the past than the pundits of futurology have foretold." This sounds marvellous. I don't think it's true—and my grocery store is currently offering thirteen varieties of instant coffee, if you count freeze-dried—but it's nice to be told that everything is going to be O.K. In our country, conservatives are a grumpy lot, but in England they are often happy—indeed, bright and fun and naughty. One envies them. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million, *by Martin Amis (Talk Miramax; $24.95).* When the historian Robert Conquest was asked in the post-Gorbachev years to give a new title to a revised edition of "The Great Terror," his classic 1968 account of the murderous Stalin era, he said to his publisher, "How about 'I Told You So, You Fucking Fools'?" Rarely has such smugness been so deeply earned. There had been many fools who dismissed Conquest as a dupe. In this meditation, the novelist Martin Amis sets out to recall the moral and intellectual blindness that allowed so many to ignore the millions of corpses and the camps, and his heroic voices include Conquest (to whom the book is dedicated), Solzhenitsyn, Koestler, and Akhmatova. "Koba the Dread" is a vivid, if often eccentric, rereading of those authors; the frequent instances when the book veers into family memoir and homely analogy, however, are less successful. At one point, Amis writes that the nighttime cries of his baby daughter "would not have been out of place in the deepest cellars of the Butyrki Prison in Moscow during the Great Terror." As it happens, they would have.

After the Dance, *by Edwidge Danticat (Crown; $16).* As a child growing up in Haiti, the novelist Edwidge Danticat was forbidden, to her undying dismay, to take part in carnival, the island's annual Mardi Gras celebration. Danticat now lives in New York, and last year she returned to the boisterous city of Jacmel for carnival week. In this engaging account, she traces the stories behind the parade's masked figures, which include a tiny boy dressed up as a frog, a giant papier-mâché butterfly, and a batlike monster with horns, as well as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and assorted devils, zombies, and AIDS activists. Through these tales, Danticat relates the history of a place—and an event—that she finds both heartbreaking and irresistible.



Bubbleology, *by Kevin Hassett (Crown; $18.95).* In the wake of the Nasdaq's precipitate decline, investors who were once boundlessly exuberant are now hopelessly downcast, convinced that the market is doomed to an endless series of boom-and-bust cycles. Adroitly synthesizing work from the fields of economics, evolutionary psychology, and social science, Hassett shows that the kind of frenzy we saw at the height of dot-com mania, far from being characteristic of financial markets, is actually relatively rare. A bubble, he argues, is almost always the product of technological upheaval, which creates great economic potential but also great economic uncertainty. Investors looking for guidance take their cue from each other, encouraging a herd mentality, and individually rational behavior creates a collectively irrational outcome. Still, for all the havoc that bubbles can wreak on our portfolios, they can also provide collective gains: the railroad bubble gave America its first transportation network, and we will be reaping the technological benefits of the Internet boom for decades to come.

Versailles, *by Kathryn Davis (Houghton Mifflin; $21).* "My soul is going on a trip. I want to talk about her." This elegant, idiosyncratic novel begins when Marie Antoinette, née Maria Antonia Josephina Johanna, Archduchess of Austria, aged fourteen, is riding in a blue-satin-lined carriage on her way to be married to the Dauphin of France. It ends with her death. Except for the brief, witty playlets studded throughout the narrative (in which various minor actors try to figure out what's going on), the Queen tells her own story, and the voice Davis has given her is by turns sage, mercurial, and ravishing. It is also edged with doom, each word bordered in black by the reader's own premonitions.

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THE ART WORLD

HITLER AS ARTIST

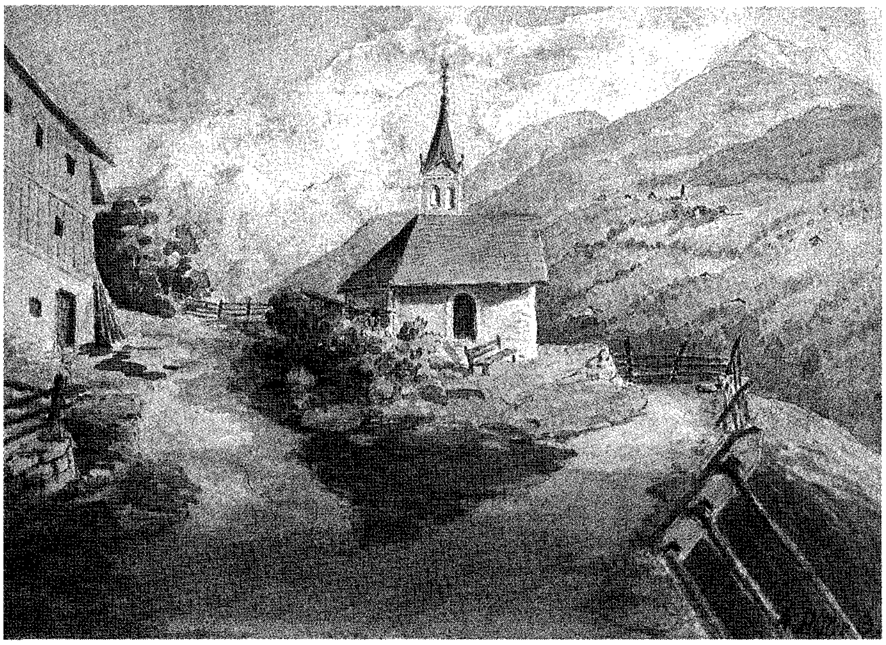
How Vienna inspired the Führer's dreams.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Adolf Hitler was an artist—a modern artist, at that—and Nazism was a movement shaped by his aesthetic sensibility. Cosmopolitan Vienna incubated his peculiar genius as well as his hideous ideas. These views have been in the air recently, and a trenchant scholarly exhibition at the Williams College Museum of Art, in Williamstown, Massachusetts—"Prelude to a Nightmare: Art, Politics, and Hitler's Early Years in Vienna 1906-1913"—advances them. The show's curator, Deborah Rothschild, was inspired by "Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship," by Brigitte Hamann (1999). A forthcoming book, "Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics," by Frederic Spotts, promises an interpretation of Hitler as "a perverted artist." Earlier this year, a show at the Jewish Museum, in New York, "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," featured mediocre conceptual work that addressed the Third Reich with lamebrained allusions to commerce and sex. By trial and error, a special analysis is in progress. It won't alter our moral and political judgments of Hitler, whose crimes remain immeasurable, but it sure shakes up conventional accounts of modern art.

Hitler was eighteen years old when, in 1908, he moved from Linz and took up residence in Vienna. He walked the same streets as Freud, Gustav Mahler, and Egon Schiele, but he did so as one of the city's faceless, teeming poor. He often slept in a squalid homeless shelter, if not under a bridge. Intent on becoming an artist, he twice failed the art academy's admission test; his drawing skills were declared "unsatisfactory." A thin, sallow youth, he wasn't cut out for physical labor. With help from a friend, he earned a meagre living drawing postcard views of Vienna and selling them to tourists. Jews were among his companions and patrons. Although he was fanatically pan-German—caught up in visions of an expanded Germany, which would incorporate Austria—he had laudatory things to say about Jews at the time. He proved, however, an apt pupil of the city's rampant strains of anti-Semitism, which exploited popular resentment of the wealthy Jewish bourgeoisie that had arisen under Franz Josef I, the conservative but clement—and, effectively, the last—Hapsburg emperor. Hitler studied the spellbinding oratorical style of the city's widely beloved populist, anti-Semitic mayor, Karl Lueger.

The young Hitler was wild for Wagnerian opera, stately architecture, and inventive graphic art and design. His taste in painting was—and remained—philistine. He swore by Eduard von Grützner, a genre painter of jolly, drunken Bavarian monks. Hitler's own stilted early efforts were the work of a provincial tyro who was ripe for instruction that he never received. (The show includes a rather nice watercolor of a mountain chapel, from a commission that was secured for him by Samuel Morgenstern, a Jewish dealer.) As with any drifting young life, Hitler's might have gone in a number of ways. The most exasperating missed opportunity was the possibility of working under the graphic artist and stage designer Alfred Roller, a member of the anti-academic Secession movement whose sets for the Vienna Court Opera's productions of Wagner, which were conducted by Mahler, foreshadowed Nazi theatricality. With a letter of introduction to Roller, Hitler approached the great man's door three times without mustering the nerve to knock. As it turned out, he seems never to have consorted with anyone whose ego overmatched his own. Grandiose and rigidly puritanical, he was a figure of fun to many of his mates in Vienna's lower depths. He accumulated humiliations on the way to becoming a god of revenge for the humiliated of Germany. Meanwhile, his adopted city fired his imagination. In "Mein Kampf," he recalled, "For hours, I could stand in front of the Opera, for hours I could gaze at the parliament; the whole Ring Boulevard seemed to me like an enchantment out of the 'Thousand and One Nights.'"



When Hitler painted "Mountain Chapel" (circa 1909), he was still a young provincial.

COURTESY WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

"Prelude to a Nightmare" affords a revelatory view of Vienna's glory days, just before the First World War.

(The period is being celebrated concurrently by other shows in the Berkshires. The Clark Art Institute, also in Williamstown, is exhibiting landscapes by Gustav Klimt, designs by Josef Hoffmann and the Wiener Werkstätte, and architectural plans by Otto Wagner; the Berkshire Museum, in Pittsfield, is showing choice posters from the Secession.) The Williams show anatomizes Hitler's responses to the city—his enchantments and disenchantments—with well-written wall texts and judiciously selected art works and artifacts. It documents scenes of imperial pageantry which, darkened and streamlined, would be echoed in Nazi rallies; and it sketches movements and individuals in the arts and politics as they must have appeared to the young man. Among the political voices are the racialists Guido von List, who, beginning in 1907, helped popularize the swastika as a sign of Aryan purity, and von List's crazy disciple Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, who believed that Aryan women, if not forcibly segregated, would inevitably fall for the demonic virility of inferior races. Hitler imbibed it all.

The show also features works by Klimt, Schiele, and other Secession artists who would later enter the Nazi lists of degenerate art. Hitler despised them for their insults to classical ideals of human beauty and for what he called, in another context, "liberalistic concepts of the individual." But he embraced cleanly abstracted and geometric styles, which later informed his own design work (notably, the stunning Nazi flag) and his shrewd patronage of the gifted youngsters Leni Riefenstahl and Albert Speer. In lengthening retrospect, it becomes harder to credit categorical distinctions between Nazi aesthetics and those of redoubtable modern movements in architecture and design, including the Bauhaus. They share roots in avant-garde Vienna.

Hitler's rise remains mysterious—if only as to the precise amount of dumb luck involved—but it makes unnerving sense when viewed in terms of an eager artist's capacity to assimilate, synthesize, and apply the influences of his time and place. "I used to think it could have been anyone," Deborah Rothschild has said, referring to the leader of the Third Reich. "But I don't think that anymore." Indeed, the show leaves no doubt that Nazism was a singular invention and that Hitler was its indispensable author. Without him, Fascism might well have succeeded in Germany, but nothing foreordained Nazism's blend of dash and malice, its brilliant technology and skulking atavism. It seems clear that Hitler employed artistic means—hypnotic oratory, moving spectacle, elegant design—not just to gain power but to wield it in the here and now. Meanwhile, he needed a political line—a cause, an enemy—that would be more dynamic than pan-Germanism. The fact that he came by the cult of Aryanism and anti-Semitism belatedly suggests that they developed as much in service to his artistic ambition as the other way around. All racism, on some level, is aesthetic, as a projection of "the ugly." Nazism, in a horrible way, was a program to remodel the world according to a certain taste.

The Williams show rebuts the comfortable sentiment that Hitler was a "failed artist." In fact, once he found his métier, in Munich after the First World War, he was masterly, first as an orator and then as an all-around impresario of political theatre. He was also deluded. He had no vision of the future apart from ever grander opera. He met his end—which, as a deep-dyed Wagnerian, he might have anticipated but apparently did not—as a quivering wreck of the boy who had been so awed by imperial Vienna. A photograph in the Williams show catches a puffy Führer in his last days, as Berlin lay in ruins, gazing rapturously at a tabletop model of Linz, which he envisioned as the cultural center of Europe, remade as a modern Valhalla. It is an appalling image, which suggests that the Second World War was incidental to a downtown redevelopment project. Rothschild, in a wall text, draws this moral from her show: "The union of malevolence and beauty can occur; we must remain vigilant against its seductive power." I disagree. We must remain vigilant against malevolence, and we should regard beauty as the fundamentally amoral phenomenon that it is. ♦

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THE THEATRE

SHOWTIME AT THE APOLLO

A New Age Harlem.

BY HILTON ALS

Throughout his career, George C. Wolfe has consistently been less influenced by the theatre than by film. Whether as the playwright of considerable promise who brought us "The Colored Museum" (1986), or as the director of considerable skill who put on "Jelly's Last Jam" (1992) and "Angels in America" (1993) and now runs New York's Public Theatre, he has always been a savvy populist at heart; he knows that the theatre has become an art form for the relatively few, but that it can be reinvigorated by the grammar of movies, which almost everyone speaks. The scenes he writes rarely drag, and the shows he stages often use blackouts to signal shifts in time and perspective which would otherwise have to be explained in onerous dialogue. Wolfe's love of movies and the jazzy rush he gets from making images work onstage with a cinematic smoothness are nowhere more apparent than in "Harlem Song," at the Apollo Theatre, a show he wrote and directed. "Harlem Song" is essentially a revue, using both old and new compositions, selected or written by Wolfe and the show's talented music supervisors, Zane Mark and Daryl Waters. It has no dialogue to speak of—or, at least, no dialogue that contributes significantly to the plot or helps to convey the historical time line that frames each set piece. Instead, Wolfe relies on fadeouts and title cards, as well as on filmed testimonies projected on a screen above the stage, to tell us where we are and what we should expect.

"Harlem Song" is divided into eleven sections—"The Harlem Renaissance," "La Imigración," "The Depression," and so on—each of which marks a particular moment in the neighborhood's social history. Wolfe's inventive staging begins in the nineteen-twenties, when the area became a Mecca for black artists, businessmen, hustlers, vamps, and writers who couldn't and wouldn't live anywhere but uptown. We watch two actors in silhouette, doing the cakewalk in front of a flickering movie screen—a nod to all those early flickers, the joyful minstrelsy captured by Thomas Edison and others. (It may also be a reference to the contemporary artist Kara Walker's controversial silhouetted figures of black people.) We have just settled into this cozy, "Ragtime"-derived scene when the Barefoot Prophet (David St. Louis), a young man with dreadlocks—a figure you might see on 125th Street today—bounds onstage. He is mad, he is brilliant, he is both our Greek chorus and our Fool. (He is also reminiscent of another movie character: the seer played by Amiri Baraka in Warren Beatty's "Bulworth.") The Barefoot Prophet gives us a kind of Harlem creation story, in which a shooting star falls and black people from all over the world make their way there to bask in its light:

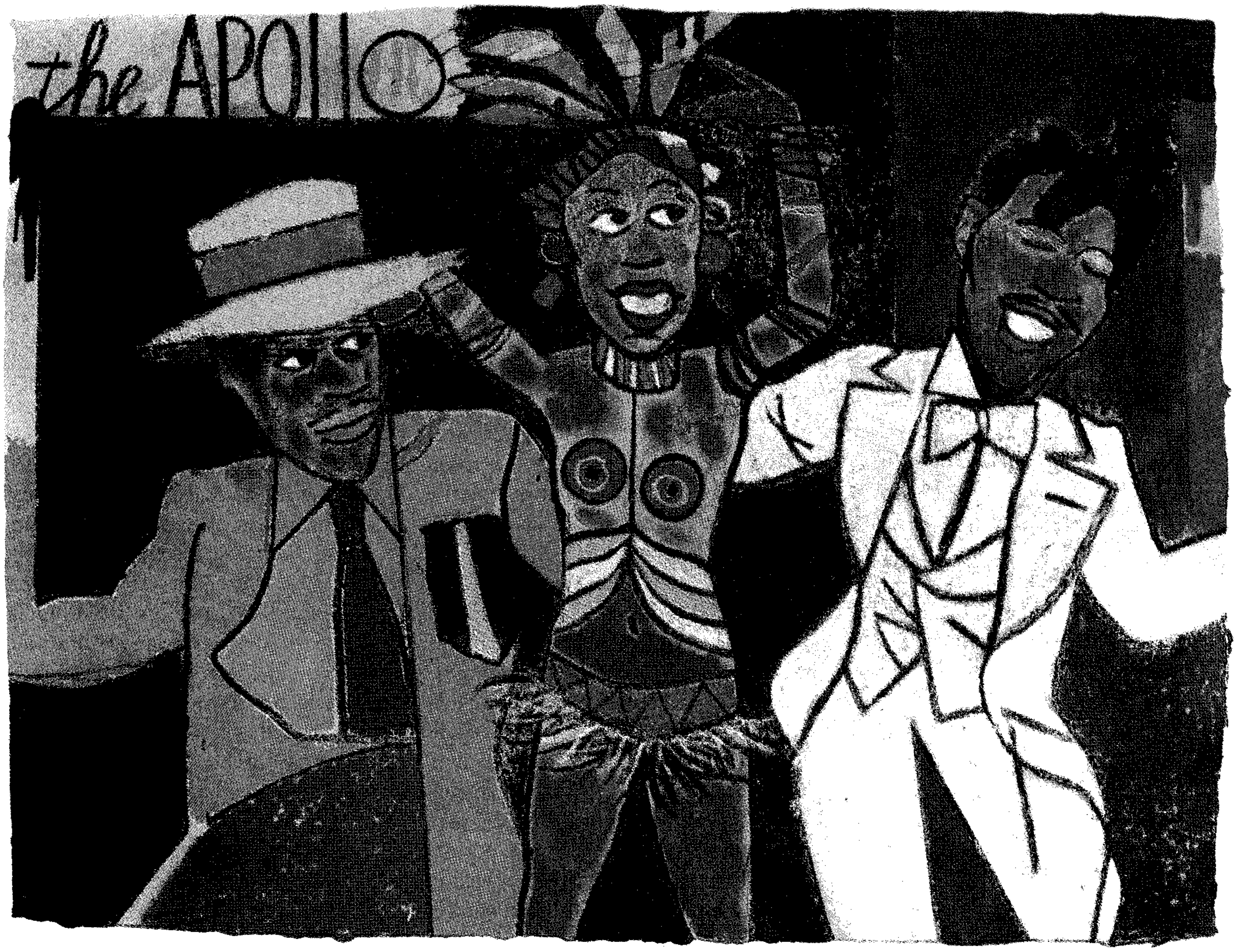
> All of 'em needin'
> N' feelin' n' believin' n' cryin'
> N' shoutin' n' defyin' n' laughin' n'
>   testifyin'
> Swingin' singin' dancin'
> All of them dreamin'
> One word.

Joining the Prophet in song is the Clarion Caller (the terrific singer and actress B. J. Crosby), an oracle of sorts, whose turbaned head floats above a scrim onto which stars are projected.

Together, the Clarion Caller and the Barefoot Prophet embody the mystical spirit of Wolfe's Harlem. And they tell us what the show is all about: like Alice Walker's "The Color Purple" and the novels of Terry McMillan, it is a form of "uplift art," whose aesthetic concerns are secondary to its desire to make "the people" feel good, about themselves and their community. The Harlem of "Harlem Song" is not an urban wasteland in the process of reinventing itself. It is a realm of legend and lore, and a mythical homeland, which it is our duty as theatregoers, as citizens, to celebrate. This is a point worth making, but not one that bears much repeating. And since there is little factual detail to support this portrayal, "Harlem Song" degenerates rather swiftly into propaganda. We see the neighborhood's fabulous past, and we hope for its fabulous future, all without quite knowing how Harlem became Harlem in the first place. It just is. And it's just wonderful.

That sense of wonder is the centerpiece of Queen Esther's performance as Miss Nightingale, who, in the Jimmie Lunceford ditty "Well Alright Then," takes us on a walking tour of the Harlem Renaissance. Miss Nightingale is a Dolly Levi of the 'hood. Flourishing her big black hat and her fox stole, she proclaims, "After years of wandering down alleyways and back roads . . . Negroes of the world at long last have boulevards broad enough for their attitude." Then, accompanied by a cast of refined, dressed-to-the-nines strollers, she points out all the glittering people in her Harlem—among them, W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Walter White, Bessie Smith, Fats Waller, and the cosmetologist and millionaire A'Lelia Walker. As Miss Nightingale rolls her eyes and struts her stuff, Wolfe shifts the emotional action of the show away from the Barefoot Prophet and the Clarion Caller's New Age African-Americans, swathed in a sort of spiritual kente cloth, to the New Negroes. Negroes have a style that is markedly different from that of African-Americans. Negroes do not wear turbans or head rags outside the house; they wear hats, cocked to the side, a visual indicator of real style—a style that encompasses both the black and the white American experience, rather than limiting itself to the dreary Pan-Africanism of colored people whose relationship to Africa is about as deep as the Eskimos'. The Negro makes do with what he has—and then he flaunts it.

As a writer, Wolfe is much more attracted to the Negro than he is to the African-American. This is what made "The Colored Museum" so enjoyable: he saw American "blackness" as a political construct that was ripe for lam-



George C. Wolfe's Harlem is not an urban wasteland in the process of reinventing itself but a realm of legend and lore.

RICHARD MERKIN

pooning. A series of sketches, "The Colored Museum" has a section, "The Last Mama on the Couch Play," that remains one of the funniest sendups of black realist theatre around. With "Harlem Song," Wolfe doesn't exactly betray his roots as a satirist, but he doesn't exploit them, either. He's torn between history and fashion, and he tries to please everyone. The virtually all-black cast is charming, but it's also inaccurate, especially when you're talking about Harlem in the nineteen-twenties. As is clear in Jervis Anderson's "This Was Harlem" and David Levering Lewis's "When Harlem Was in Vogue," what made the neighborhood so fascinating was its extraordinary ability to add a multitude of immigrant experiences to the Negro melting pot. "Harlem Song" has a brief, undeveloped section about the Latinos who created Spanish Harlem, which includes a Spanish-language version of "Take the A Train." (And never mind that anyone actually wishing to go to Spanish Harlem, which is on the East Side, would be better off taking the No. 6.) But we see almost nothing of the Jews who stayed on in West Harlem for years after Miss Nightingale's "niggerati" had moved uptown.

Wolfe's loyalty to blackness feels obligatory, as we journey forward in time through the forties, fifties, and sixties, and the show closes with a paean to "the tree of life" and a reprise of the Barefoot Prophet's shooting star. The action onstage, aside from Ken Roberson's controlled and often amusing choreography, is far less intriguing than the moving footage of real longtime Harlem residents which plays on the screen above the stage. We rely, for example, on one of these "witnesses" to tell us that Harlem's downfall, as a neighborhood and as a cultural force, in the early sixties was due largely to the destruction of family-owned homes and the construction of the projects that mar its landscape now. For blacks living in those hideous concrete structures, imprisoned rather than celebrated by their community, drugs and crime became the social order of the day—far more popular than, say, stopping off at the Schomburg Library before heading over to the Savoy or the Apollo. Indirectly, the witnesses testify to the deficiencies onstage. What their authenticity, and the remarkable editing of the footage, does show us is Wolfe's potential as a filmmaker. Take, for instance, B. J. Crosby, whose reappearance, partway through the show, as a blues singer riffing on the novelty song "For Sale" is one of the most hilarious and licentious things I've ever seen on the stage. She's a star, and Wolfe knows it. If he were to devise a movie for her, we'd have something that American cinema is truly lacking: the narrative of a real American Negro woman. She has the voice and the style for it, and Wolfe has the skill. The theatre only hampers his cinematic flair. ♦

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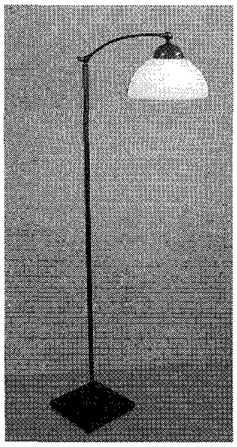

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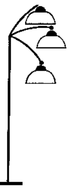

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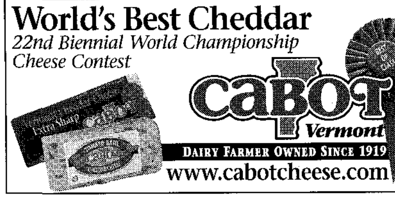

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"XXX" and "Blood Work."

BY DAVID DENBY

Vin Diesel, the star of the spy-movie pastiche "XXX," has serious pecs and abs and, I'm told, a provocative belly button (it's high). He shaves his head, and his voice is a laughing street rumble with a slightly acrid, burned-onion edge—he is certainly an antidote to the bland, pretty-boy style of such young actors as Freddie Prinze, Jr., and Josh Hartnett. Diesel performed in a disciplined way in "Saving Private Ryan" and "Boiler Room," and last year he was brazenly funny (if not always intentionally so) as the morally severe thug in the honor-among-car-thieves classic "The Fast and the Furious." Since he's reportedly half Italian, half African-American, and could probably also pass for Latino, Diesel doesn't leave a great many ethnic groups outside the theatre, and, following the success of "F and F," he has assumed the aura of an inevitable marketing triumph. (He is said to have demanded a fee of thirty million dollars to appear in a sequel.) But is he a movie star? What *is* a movie star at this point? The editors who put him on magazine covers and the media executives who celebrate his face and body on TV aren't responding to talent. They're responding to an act of brash self-creation. Diesel, thirty-five, was born Mark Vincent and grew up in the rent-subsidized artists' residence of Westbeth, in Greenwich Village; his mother is an astrologer, and his stepfather, who helped raise him, is an acting teacher. As a teen-ager, Diesel put in a lot of time at the gym, and he later worked for a while as a bouncer at the Tunnel. By recounting his history in bohemian and show-business Manhattan, I don't mean to imply that his lack of hard-callus experience disqualifies him from playing tough guys. Clark Gable knocked around in the oil fields as a young man, and Charles Bronson was a miner, but Humphrey Bogart grew up in a town house near Riverside Drive and went to Andover, and Robert De Niro's father was a well-known New York painter. The only thing that matters, ultimately, is what an actor can do on the screen.

In "XXX," Vin Diesel's voice turns sludgy and slow, and his attempts at repartee come off as lame. He has sold himself as an action star, but in this picture he spends so much time up in the air, suspended in digitized slow motion, that one has trouble telling if he can actually move. He dangles, he jumps, he rides motorcycles. But can he walk? An action star has to have a walk—look at John Wayne, or Mel Gibson. He also has to try, now and then, to notice the other people in his films, and Diesel's response to the performers in "XXX" is both grandiose and slighting, as if he were annoyed by their intruding on his movie at all. Diesel has the majestic self-regard of a "SmackDown" brawler, and people who enjoy arrogance in neophytes may be amused by his assumption of his own preëminence. The promoters must be enjoying themselves, too. Selling Vin Diesel as a great star is a fine piece of mischief, a put-on to rival the greatest feats in the history of ballyhoo.

The veteran producer-director Rob Cohen, who hit pay dirt with Diesel in "The Fast and the Furious," has directed him again in "XXX." Cohen, fifty-three and a Harvard man, recently shaved his own head, perhaps in homage to his star. He pierced his ear, too, and embraced what he calls "the kid in me." Cohen could be onto something; in any case, no one in the movie

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business is going to make fun of a regression as lucrative as his. Cohen describes "XXX" as a "total reinvention of the spy film for a new generation." He says, "It's not 'Austin Powers'—it's not a spoof—but it's not James Bond, either. It's totally different." I assume that these remarks are also part of the put-on, since "XXX" is a flat-out imitation of the Bond formula in almost every respect. It has a foreign locale (Prague), a decadent supervillain (Marton Csokas, who caresses his swinish lines), and a witch-eyed shady lady (Asia Argento). It has thugs, including one with metal teeth, just like Richard Kiel in "The Spy Who Loved Me." It has an imperious boss (Samuel L. Jackson, in plastic hair), an equipment nut (Michael Roof), and a souped-up classic car (a Pontiac GTO). It even has a doomsday machine, a sort of cheesy surface craft that threatens international cities with chemical-biological attack. The only thing in the movie that isn't stolen from Bond is its down-market street hero, Xander Cage, an extreme-sports athlete who is recruited into intelligence work. Diesel wears tattoos rather than a tuxedo, and eschews shaken-not-stirred alcoholic beverages. He's also rather less interested in sex than Bond. The real turn-on in "XXX" is the explosions, which spread flames like ketchup across the easily ignited sets. "XXX" was not directed; it was launched, in the familiar corporate-schlock style of blockbusters in the last few years. Rob Cohen slams some of the sequences together so crudely that one shot has very little spatial relation to the next. I did enjoy a beautiful digital avalanche at the end, and a few moments of humor; but, in general, the idea of Cohen as liberated child is more gratifying than anything he puts on the screen. This reborn "kid" turns out to be one wily youth-exploitation filmmaker. He may be young again, but he's about as innocent as a carnival barker.

Vin Diesel provokes the question What is *a movie star at this point?*

ERIC PALMA

In itself, "XXX" is not worth getting bothered about—a half-dozen big pictures as bad as this one come out every year. At the very worst, it will kick off a pointless new movie franchise in which the Diesel gets to smash up the capitals of Europe, one at a time. But the magazines and the media promoters aiding this new monetary phenomenon may be doing more than their share of harm. Yes, the entertainment press has been part of the promotional apparatus for awful movies for many years. What's new, I think, is that many editors and reporters have apparently convinced themselves that commerce is hip and talent and art are boring—or beside the point. A passionate and inventive young actor couldn't possibly interest the media as much as this padded mock star.

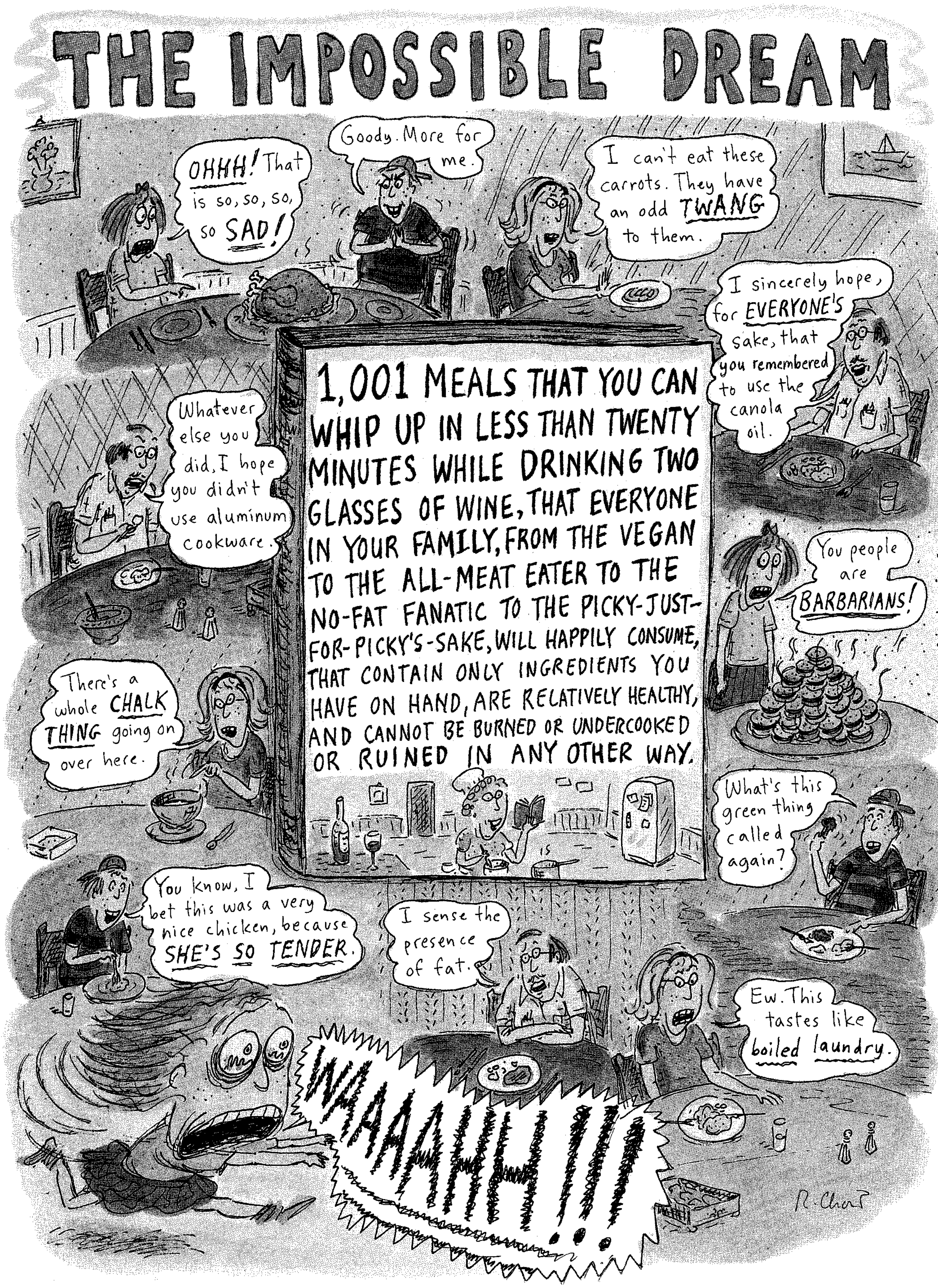
Clint Eastwood has his vanities, too, but he's an amazingly enduring star and a fascinating, though limited, actor. In "Blood Work," his Terry McCaleb, a veteran F.B.I. operative in Los Angeles, runs block after block in pursuit of a serial killer and suffers a heart attack. Two years later, he's still alive, but he now carries within his body the heart of a woman who was recently murdered. Hoarse and a little short of breath, Eastwood is easily knocked over by anyone halfway strong; he has to swallow innumerable pills, and he keeps touching his chest, as if he were not quite sure that the heart is still there. The movie, which Eastwood also directed, is really about his body—his frailty, his strength, his noble trunk, seventy-two years old and scarred for the occasion, but looking good at any age. McCaleb is retired, but, against the advice of his doctor (Anjelica Huston), he decides to track down the murderer of the woman who left him her ticker. He's a man who can't turn away from a moral imperative. Given all the nasty avengers he's played, the idea of Eastwood as all heart is a bit much, but he has some moments of remarkable fierceness, in which the intensity leaps out of his famous skull like lightning. "Blood Work" is a testament to experience and to the wisdom of saving one's energy for what's serious in life. The movie is a methodical and entirely absorbing thriller, featuring a complicated plot (Brian Helgeland adapted the Michael Connelly novel) in which clues are carefully planted, and understanding slowly gathers in the mind of the hero. Shot in the California sunshine, "Blood Work" lacks atmosphere, but Eastwood turns that to account—the daylight almost antagonizes McCaleb, mocking his ability to see what's there. Eastwood directs very calmly, allowing scenes to play at length, pausing to let minor actors blossom for a minute or two of screen time. Jeff Daniels, as a yacht-basin bum who lives on the same pier as McCaleb, in San Pedro, gives one of his most effectively shamefaced performances. The movie is a vehicle for Eastwood, but the great man knows that a star shines brightest in the reflected light of other good performers. ◆

From the Houghton (Mich.) Daily Mining Gazette.

LAW TO HELP DISABLE WORKERS

But there's only so much that government can do.

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST


THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM
OHHH! That is so, so, so, so SAD!
Goody. More for me.
I can't eat these carrots. They have an odd TWANG to them.
I sincerely hope, for EVERYONE'S sake, that you remembered to use the canola oil.
1,001 MEALS THAT YOU CAN WHIP UP IN LESS THAN TWENTY MINUTES WHILE DRINKING TWO GLASSES OF WINE, THAT EVERYONE IN YOUR FAMILY, FROM THE VEGAN TO THE ALL-MEAT EATER TO THE NO-FAT FANATIC TO THE PICKY-JUST-FOR-PICKY'S-SAKE, WILL HAPPILY CONSUME, THAT CONTAIN ONLY INGREDIENTS YOU HAVE ON HAND, ARE RELATIVELY HEALTHY, AND CANNOT BE BURNED OR UNDERCOOKED OR RUINED IN ANY OTHER WAY.
Whatever else you did, I hope you didn't use aluminum cookware.
You people are BARBARIANS!
There's a whole CHALK THING going on over here.
What's this green thing called again?
You know, I bet this was a very nice chicken, because SHE'S SO TENDER.
I sense the presence of fat.
Ew. This tastes like boiled laundry.
WAAAAHH!!!
R. Chast

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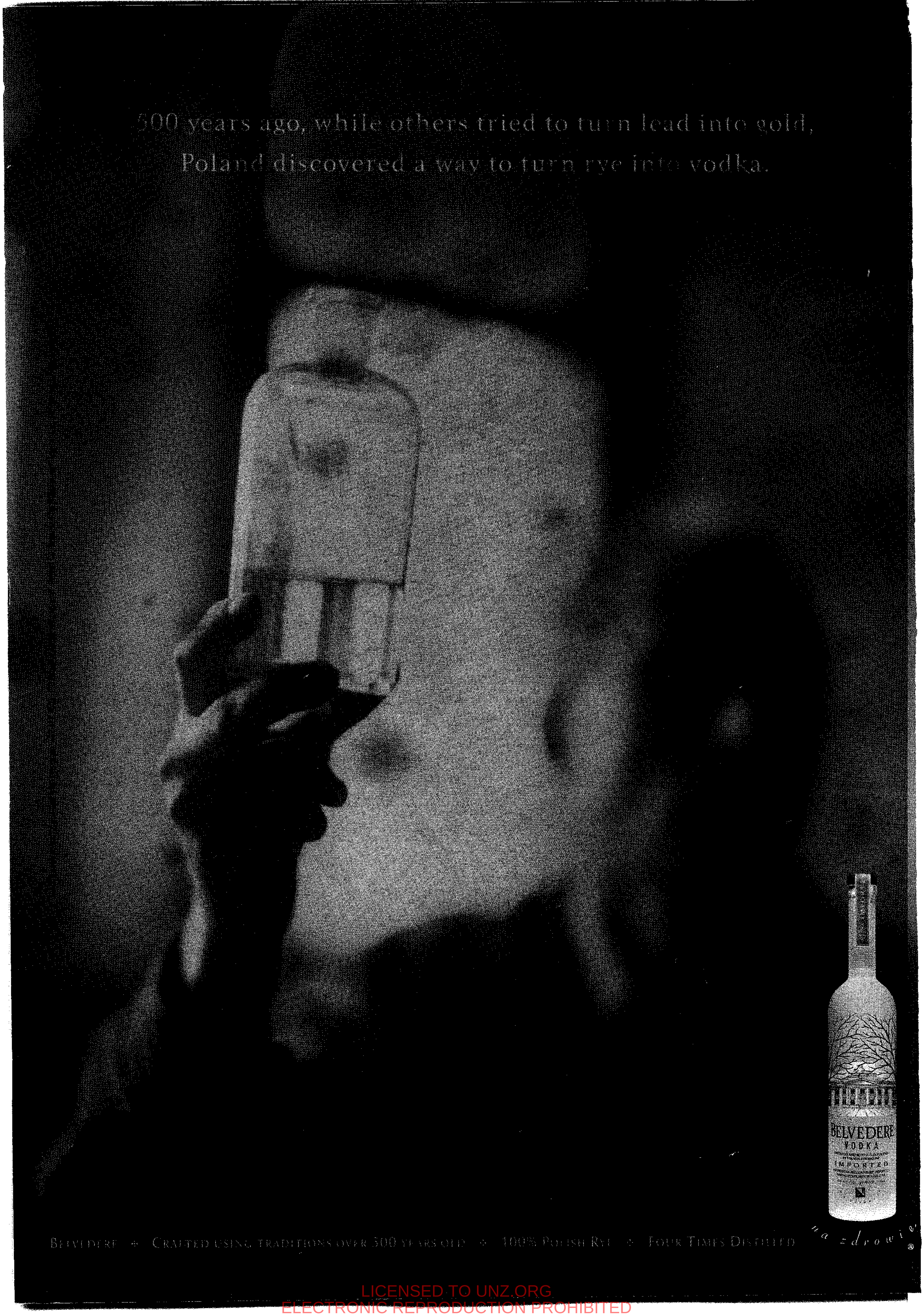
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